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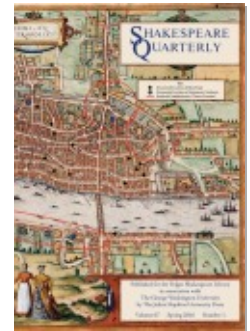
“A New Scholarly Song”: Rereading Early Modern Race

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## From the Editors

### “A New Scholarly Song”: Rereading Early Modern Race

These seven essays and the seminar in which they first circulated emerged in the wake of the 2013 Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) meeting in Toronto, which had as one of its unspoken focuses early modern race studies.<sup>1</sup> Two plenary sessions, three seminars, and a workshop engaged with the question of race in Renaissance studies more than twenty years after the major wave of scholarship that appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Each day of this meeting gave interested observers the chance to ask what has changed and where the field is going in the context of comparative approaches to race studies. While some seemed to feel that this programming gave too much airtime to questions of race, the plenary sessions themselves revealed that there had been very little transformation during the intervening decades in how we as a scholarly community think and learn about race. One plenary contained a paper featuring a strikingly offensive use of visual images and another paper that derailed a broadening of inquiry by suggesting, in an ill-defined way, that inadequate policing of our students' sense of the past was “dangerous.” Race-conscious attendees struggled—within the confines of the politesse that makes the SAA both welcoming to newcomers and somewhat averse to political intervention—to suggest how the papers erased questions and epistemologies important to politically engaged scholarship, if not to the very humanity of black people. After public papers in years past alerting the SAA to its race problem, the 2013 meeting

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The guest editors thank Hannah Ehrenberg, who helped organize the online component of the seminar and assisted in our work on this issue; the members and auditors of the “Early Modern Race / Ethnic / Diaspora Studies” seminar; SAA trustee Ayanna Thompson, who suggested after the seminar that the time was ripe for a special issue on this topic; and *Shakespeare Quarterly* editor Gail Kern Paster for her openness to a new intervention.

<sup>1</sup> The quotation in our title comes from Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 144.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Erickson, “The Moment of Race in Renaissance Studies,” *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998): 27–36.

marked a profound and disillusioning moment of alienation for many people of color at the conference.<sup>3</sup>

Even as the SAA had one of its largest meetings ever, with a correspondingly larger gathering of people of color, the sense of belonging for longtime attendees was revealed as precarious, and our sense of progress was shattered. Afterward, SAA members tried to diagnose and address the problem, both individually and collectively. With the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, questions of race seemed too urgent to continue business as usual at the place some of us consider our scholarly home. There was some agreement that the 2013 meeting represented a step back for the SAA and that it revealed the recursiveness of early modern race studies, where the importance of race is either ignored altogether or subject to an unhealthy back-and-forth in which scholars focusing on race confront the same (already addressed) questions and pushback from editors, readers, and audience members whose only investment in race seems to be disciplinary.<sup>4</sup> This can be attributed partially to the fact that the vanguard of critical race theory with which we are in dialogue takes place elsewhere and that our Shakespeare interlocutors can't be expected to be knowledgeable about the extensive body of race theory in the past fifty years. But after more than twenty years of scholarship in early modern studies, we can only conclude that these acts of refusal are also due to a pathological averseness to thinking about race under the guise of protecting historical difference.<sup>5</sup> Many scholars genially dismissive of

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Margo Hendricks, "I saw him in my visage': Problems with Race Studies in Early Modern English Literature," paper delivered as part of the presentation "Black Studies in the English Renaissance" at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting, Bellevue, WA, April 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Several papers in this issue point to the increasingly obvious erasure of race in scholarship and the absence of race as a visible frame at conferences, as, for example, in a recent "early modern futures" conference in which race, slavery, and empire were barely mentioned. While one might argue over race's prominence as a recognized category, that slavery, empire, and an increasingly racialized world were in England's future is beyond debate.

<sup>5</sup> The refusal to see race has been an ongoing issue in race studies; see, for example, Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), 137–39; and Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992), 17. It was addressed in early modern race studies scholarship early on; see Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995), 254–68; and Francesca T. Royster, "The 'End of Race' and the Future of Early Modern Cultural Studies," *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998): 59–69, esp. 61–63. On post-racial ideology, particularly in the wake of Barack Obama's 2008 election, see Kyle Grady in this issue. See also Ian Haney, "Is the Post in Post-Racial the Blind in Colorblind?," *Cardozo Law Review* 32.3 (1 January 2011): 807–31; and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David Dietrich, "The Sweet Enchantment of Color-Blind Racism in Obama," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634.190 (2011): 190–206.

race know little of the extensive scholarship on race—in either its early modern or modern form. More alarmingly, there will be fewer of us doing the vital work of thinking about race then and now if graduate advisors and other mentors continually discourage students from entering early modern race studies. After years of being on the forefront of questions of early modern race and colonialism in particular, the conversation in the world of Shakespeare had clearly stalled.

Ignoring or disparaging race will not make it go away as a question for our—or Shakespeare’s—time. We thus have set our sights on the next decade, using 2025 as a landmark by which to measure subsequent progress toward establishing the field of early modern race studies with a stronger foundation through a wide spectrum of social issues, a broader scholarly framework, a larger academic audience, and deeper public engagement.<sup>6</sup> It is important to begin by evoking the extraordinary seminar experience in which the essays selected for this special issue originated. The group gathered for “Early Modern Race / Ethnic / Diaspora Studies” at the 2015 SAA conference in Vancouver. The wide age range among the participants created a special sense of two generations working together. This unusual degree of cross-generational spirit and energy inspired us to think in long-range terms about possibilities for the development and expansion of early modern race studies. A significant enhancement of this feeling of intellectual community came from the first Scholars of Color reception at the 2015 meeting and the announced commitment to make this event a regular feature of the annual SAA meeting.

In order to formulate a new critical direction, we start with an overall time frame consisting of four phases. In the pre-1990 period, Sierra Leonean Eldred Durosimi Jones represents the first segment of scholarship on race. His two books—*Othello’s Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (1965) and *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (1971)—exemplify the analysis of early modern conceptions of race using now-familiar visual images as well as literary texts.<sup>7</sup> With an Oxford education and an academic career in Sierra Leone, Jones

<sup>6</sup> In this we echo Francesca Royster’s earlier call in her essay “The ‘End of Race’ and the Future of Early Modern Cultural Studies” for scholars to “negotiate the larger public’s suspicion of multiculturalism’s relevance to the past” (63). Although Royster wrote this essay at the height of one form of the culture wars, her sense of the need for increased attention to race and its historicity in the face of attempts to “wipe the slate clean of the cultural and political conflicts and tensions engendered by past inequalities” (61) remains salient. See n. 5

<sup>7</sup> Eldred Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Published on behalf of Fourah Bay College, the University College of Sierra Leone by Oxford UP, 1965); and Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by UP of Virginia, 1971).

in effect negotiates his own position between England and a West African British colony through Othello. Jones's first title breaks Othello's cultural isolation by the author's implicit claim to be one of Othello's countrymen.

The difference between this earlier period of individual work and the emergence of the second phase of sustained collective moment in the 1990s lies in the great increase in the number of scholars consciously engaging in a group effort and actively contributing to the collaborative project of building and validating the field of race studies in the Renaissance. Three books—Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, and Renaissance Drama* (1989); *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (1994), edited by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker; and Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995)—continue to stand out as key landmarks, while the overall related bibliography of work by others forms a substantial body.<sup>8</sup> From this core there is no turning back. The issue of early modern race will not go away. The only direction is going forward and the only question is how we can best move ahead.

However, the third segment in our time line is the interim between 2000 and 2015, which defines where we are in the present. During this fifteen-year period, there is no single methodological direction but rather a set of multiple directions that are not clearly coordinated. Whatever is gained in overall growth through these varied explorations is accompanied by a sacrifice. Dispersal creates a loss of concentrated collective energy and, in particular, a specific curtailment or abandonment of political focus. In this mixed phase, intellectual perspectives, even when potentially innovative, can also readily shift toward an excessive academic caution in approaching race that effectively stifles or rejects race as a legitimate early modern issue. The seminar in Vancouver began to restore this muted or missing political dimension by explicitly articulating the political implications of early modern race studies as a vital and central element in the analytic process. This renewal marks for us a turning point: a return to a more comprehensive commitment to the question of how we can develop additional aspects of the political significance of race in the early modern field. This prospect constitutes the fourth segment of the time line, to which we will return in due course.

Initial opposition to early modern race studies, associated primarily with New Historicism, was encapsulated in the single word "anachronism" and informally deployed as a scare tactic and conversation stopper. As an automatic reflex, this response too easily slides into blanket denial. Overemphasis on

<sup>8</sup> Other writers on race in the 1990s and following in the next decade include Imtiaz Habib, Sujata Iyengar, Arthur L. Little Jr., Joyce Green MacDonald, Francesca T. Royster, Ian Smith, and Ayanna Thompson, among many others.

anachronism has run its course, and its persuasive power is now diminished. Insufficient attention, however, has been given to the critical polar opposite—the motif of universality currently represented in Kiernan Ryan's *Shakespeare's Universality*.<sup>9</sup> If New Historicism has a tendency to insist on the early modern period as so different historically as to be cut off from our contemporary culture, then universality imagines a period through line so smooth and similar that it connects the early modern and the contemporary with virtually no disruptions or differences at all. Ironically, both approaches produce the same result: the erasure of race. In such narrow historicism the early modern period has no recognizable link to race in our current lives, while universalism as practiced by Ryan characterizes Shakespeare's resolutions of the stress points and tensions of racial difference as readily carrying over and automatically applicable to the removal of race problems in our contemporary culture.

In Ryan's presentation of Shakespeare's universality, the elimination of racial difficulty is clearly displayed as a disappearing act. Believing in universality makes it unnecessary to consider race seriously because Shakespeare has already demonstrated how to solve the problem. Yet Ryan's streamlined portrait of Shakespeare is constructed by minimizing and downplaying Shakespeare's complexities in advance to the point of disregarding the evidence. For example, the major case of *Othello* is almost completely avoided, thus obviating the need to address the lead character's individual racial identity, the consequences of which Shakespeare crucially dramatizes in detail with deeply unsettling tragic results. Black lives mattered even then. In Ryan's version of universality, there is no incentive to think about the specificity of race, despite the fact that we still are struggling today to recover from and to encompass Othello's racially specific fate.<sup>10</sup>

As an alternative to Ryan's wishing the problem of race away, early modern race studies places more emphasis on race, not less, and increases the opportunities for discussing race by focusing on new directions for analysis. We want to identify seven concerns that do not claim to be all-inclusive but are intended rather to motivate additional interpretive possibilities capable of further extending the critical scope of our field. First, bringing together early modern literature and early modern visual culture makes it possible to go beyond the literary in pursuing his-

<sup>9</sup> Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Universality: Here's Fine Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015). A precursor to the book is Ryan, "Here's fine revolution: Shakespeare's Philosophy of the Future," *Essays in Criticism* 63.2 (2013): 105–27. Ryan's use of the key term "future" contrasts sharply with the view of the future to be proposed here in the context of early modern race studies.

<sup>10</sup> An example of a full elaboration of this point is Peter Erickson's essay "Concluding *Othello*: Contrasting Endings by Shakespeare and Fred Wilson," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34.2 (Summer 2016): 277–93.

torically specific definitions of race for the early modern period. The visual field offers a further opportunity to create a stronger overall approach. After all, Shakespeare's theater is a visual, as well as a verbal, medium for performing racial identities. The term "cross-disciplinary" is appropriate for this approach because it involves combining, but not conflating, fields. We cross the boundary between two distinct fields that remain distinct. We go back and forth over the boundary but the boundary doesn't go away. The analytic insights of this procedure have not been exhausted; there are still potential openings to be explored that could help us to create an expanded field for early modern race studies.

Second, race scholarship needs to continue to expand beyond the limits of England and its colonies, providing a wider European purview that combines different linguistic and national traditions. Since this work is often isolated in separate language departments, there needs to be active collaborations across disciplines and geographies, thus sharing racial studies in progress across departmental lines.<sup>11</sup> Beyond this regional network, interactive geographies can be envisioned as shown by Sandra Young's discussion in this issue of an extensive North-South dynamic. Shakespeare's imagination is not restricted exclusively to England as his frequent, far-afield dramatic engagement with the multiethnic Mediterranean world testifies. In addition, Shakespeare studies needs to foster collaborative and cross-national investigations into techniques of racialization. Ian Smith's essay "Othello's Black Handkerchief" (2013) came up frequently in the seminar as a model for both reexamining our assumptions about props and questioning the ubiquitous assumption of whiteness in our scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Early modern purveyors and consumers of theater had an interest in stagecraft and techniques across national borders, which raises questions about the economics and props of stagecraft—ranging from the possible appearance of people of color onstage, to the labor, materials, and commercial networks mobilized to create the appearance of racial difference.

Third, rejuvenation can come from proactively acknowledging the connection between early modern and contemporary periods. These are not two completely separate compartments to keep strictly disconnected. Race studies cannot begin with the eighteenth or the nineteenth century. A comprehensive study of racial configurations and iconographies requires a longer historical time line. The conceptual formulation of early modern race studies necessitates that we go all the way back to consider the role of race in the medieval and

<sup>11</sup> For this cross-national exchange, we are indebted to the "Staging Africans: Race and Representation in Early Modern Theatres" conference, Columbia University, New York, NY, 23 October 2015; and the two-part session "Slavery and Race in Europe before 1611" at the Renaissance Society of America meeting, New York, NY, March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64.1 (2013): 1–25.

Renaissance eras. This emphatically does not mean using the same definition of race across the entire historical spectrum. Rather, the challenge is to trace the variations as the idea's significance changes over time, as well as to consider how our own historical moment shapes our questions. The term "cross-historical" enables us to ask new questions about the vast span that constitutes our legacy, to engage the full depth and intractability of the racial problems we are up against, and to understand why it is so hard to change. Again, there is no conflation of past and present. Instead, two historical moments with distinct ideas of race are put in interpretive relation to produce a comparative perspective. This lengthened historical line has not yet been sufficiently traversed in either direction and therefore holds out opportunities for expanding the scope of early modern race studies in a manner that is more comprehensive.

Fourth, more work needs to be done in the area of early modern whiteness studies. The use of the term "race" to mean only black or "of color" is unsatisfactory even in the Renaissance. The full complexity of the term becomes accessible when whiteness as a racial category is also examined. Whiteness studies is already a rich subfield within critical race studies and the collection *White People in Shakespeare*, a project in progress edited by Arthur Little Jr., suggests that this important focal point will now be the subject of major examination by early modern scholars. While recognizing what this immense and growing field has achieved, we caution that without commitment to a liberatory politics whiteness studies too has the potential to reinscribe rather than dismantle structures of power.<sup>13</sup> Arthur Little's essay in the present issue reveals the complexities that arise when racial whiteness becomes a source of attraction rather than a subject of analysis.

Fifth, we should continue expanding and theorizing the archive of race, seeking out new texts, questions, and vocabulary. The essays in this issue make clear that there is a race canon of sorts, an array of primary texts (*Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The White Devil*, documents surrounding Queen Elizabeth's expulsion of the Moors, George Best's narrative, etc.). The accompanying scholarship offers windows into certain aspects of early modern race formation, but also suggests much-needed enlargement and redefinition. As Young notes in this issue, examinations of the rich vocabulary of bodily and cultural difference have been central to early modern race studies and can have important political purchase. Equally significantly, Urvashi Chakravarty's essay suggests that questions of similitude that underlie languages of "family" and "service" need to be reexamined in the context of early modern notions of the

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Maulana Karenga, "Whiteness Studies: Deceptive or Welcome Discourse?," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 16.6 (1999): 26–28; and Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," *Boundary 2* 26.3 (1999): 115–50.



“strange.” Recently, following the Dominican Republic’s implementation of its controversial 2013 denaturalization law (known as *La Sentencia*), the CUNY Graduate Center used keywords to uncover materials about the African presence in early Hispaniola in order to educate the public about the long history of African descended peoples in the Dominican Republic.<sup>14</sup> Yet scholars also need to be alive to the ways that terminology less obviously about bodily difference does some of the organizational work of race.<sup>15</sup> Exploring concepts of labor, freedom, and polity are also crucial in understanding their transformation in later eras.<sup>16</sup>

So too, we need continued historical and archival research into the presence of early modern people of color and the meanings of their lives, a task made complicated because both whiteness and racial formation are too often still invisible to historians of the period. In this sense one must note the role of Imtiaz Habib’s *Black Lives in the English Archives* in pushing forward a conversation on black presence studies, archival practice, and race. Race-conscious archival work must also understand the archive itself as produced out of colonial and racialized assumptions about which lives are deemed worth documenting.<sup>17</sup> Ideally this work would be in closer dialogue with historians working on early modern race formation from a Black/Critical Race/Africana Studies approach.<sup>18</sup> So too, there must be a continued internal questioning of the grounding assumptions of our own work. Emily Weissbourd’s recent essay on Elizabeth I’s expulsion orders challenges the early work of Hall and Loomba on those orders, suggesting that these edicts implicate Elizabeth’s Privy Council

<sup>14</sup> *Sixteenth-Century La Española: Glimpses of the First Blacks in the Early Colonial Americas*, CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, The City College of New York, New York, NY, 22 May to 10 September 2015.

<sup>15</sup> See Valerie Traub’s discussion of “habit” in “Mapping the Global Body,” in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000), 44–97, esp. 51–59. See also Sandra Young’s discussion of the “global south” in this issue.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Steven Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001), which suggests that the language Italians use to think about race and labor is shaped by the language used in medieval Italy.

<sup>17</sup> For more theorizing of the archive, particularly in the context of race and slavery, see Sandra Young’s essay in this issue; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016); and Yvette Christiansë, “‘Heartsore’: The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery,” in “Rewriting Dispersal: Africana Gender Studies,” ed. Christine Cynn and Kim F. Hall, *S&F Online* 7.2 (2009).

<sup>18</sup> Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 2009); Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006); and Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex, and the Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009).

in a nascent slave trade.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, in our SAA seminar, auditor Lehua Yim provoked the group to consider how using the terminology and structures of "race" occludes questions of native sovereignty and to ask whether we reproduce one structure of domination as we attempt to displace another.<sup>20</sup>

Sixth, there needs to be more studies of race and performance that themselves theorize/critique race rather than simply document the activities of people of color in the service of proving Shakespeare's universality.<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare and *Latinidad* emerged at the 2015 SAA meeting as a significant new direction, suggesting the importance of culturally sensitive explorations of how communities of color engage with Shakespeare and what ideas about race emerge in that interaction. Part of the NextGenPlen panel, Carla Della Gatta's paper argued that Latino adaptations of Shakespeare are a booming business for the United States and suggested that monolingualism in such productions is a significant marker of whiteness.<sup>22</sup> Ruben Espinosa's essay in this issue suggests that Latino/a students' engagement with Shakespeare "can shed light on both the promise and the failings of Shakespeare studies amid the shifting demographic in America" (52).

Seventh, the explicit linkage of two terms in another volume in process—*Shakespeare and Social Justice*, edited by David Ruiter—also signals a new arena of investigation that requires us to think about social justice in relation to Shakespeare's drama in his time and in our own. Through the vast arena of ongoing theatrical production, Shakespeare has a pervasive cultural and institutional presence. Regarding the continued relevance of his work, one of the major challenges is considering the vulnerabilities and limitations that universality glosses over. Part of the discussion concerns the prospect that

<sup>19</sup> Emily Weissbourd, "'Those in their possession': Race, Slavery, and Queen Elizabeth's 'Edicts of Expulsion,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78.1 (2015): 1–19.

<sup>20</sup> Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua's 2005 essay, "Decolonizing Antiracism," which challenged the ways "Aboriginal people and perspectives are excluded within antiracism" (120), and a later critique of this essay by Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright have been the basis for heated debate among scholars in Native American/indigenous and immigration studies. See Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005): 120–43; and Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, "Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States," *Social Justice* 35.3 (2008–9): 120–38.

<sup>21</sup> The BBA Shakespeare (British Black and Asian Shakespeare) project out of the University of Warwick is collecting historical data and documenting contemporary Black and Asian artists' performances of Shakespeare while at the same time bringing awareness of questions of diversity and race in contemporary Shakespeare performance. See <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/multiculturalshakespeare/>; and @BBAShakespeare on Twitter.

<sup>22</sup> Carla Della Gatta, "From *West Side Story* to *Hamlet*, *Prince of Cuba*: Shakespeare and Latinidad in the United States," paper delivered as part of the NextGenPlen panel session at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting, Vancouver, British Columbia, April 2015. A version of this paper is forthcoming in *Shakespeare Studies* 44 (2016): 151–56.

Shakespeare's work cannot always adequately address current issues of racism and racial justice. Even if the arc of our moral universe bends toward justice, it may be that Shakespeare's moral universe does not bend far enough to go the distance needed now. In a long-term perspective, Shakespeare's meaning is not fixed once and for all; it may change as we change.

There is much to be done here over the next decade. What will this discussion look like when we reach 2025? Looking forward to that time, we hope to see a revitalized, intellectually expansive, solidly established field for early modern race studies that attracts much larger audiences in both academic and public spheres. We also believe that new work within this field has the potential to make a relevant contribution to change on a wider scale with respect to racial justice. Going forward, early modern race studies requires ongoing adjustment to our grounding assumptions. One major critical move has been to foreground differences between early modern modes of race thinking and modern race and racism by establishing early modern racialism as "fluid," with unstable and/or tenuous links between skin color, temperament, culture, and the body. Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton warn that "it is important to remember that even when racial ideologies and racist practices became more entrenched and pernicious, there was no singular approach to or agreement about human difference."<sup>23</sup> Even within Enlightenment texts that propose unified schemas of human difference, taxonomy and categorizations frequently break down, particularly along the lines of gender, reproduction, and cultural mixture. Although the latest work by Lara Bovilsky, Sujata Iyengar, and others operates in a less apologetic mode, the gesture toward fluidity nonetheless remains a way of isolating the past from the present, reifying a narrative that makes race the regrettable product of modernity.<sup>24</sup> More dangerously, it leaves in place an unspoken assumption that contemporary racism (based on "real race") is defined by purposeful prejudice and a rigidly taxonomic view of the world. To identify fluidity as a defining difference of early modern race produces contemporary race formation as stable, deliberate, and without contradictions, a misconception

<sup>23</sup> Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, introduction to *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–36, esp. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Geraldine Heng challenges modern race theory's adherence to this narrative: "Race theory is predicated on an unexamined narrative of temporality in the West: a *grand récit* that reifies modernity as telos and origin." See "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 8.5 (2011): 258–74, esp. 262. For the refusal of fluidity as an early modern property, see Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008), 3. See also Sujata Iyengar's discussion of the relationship of early modern race studies to the historiography of race theory in *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2005), 4–7.

addressed by both Vanessa Corredera and Kyle Grady in this issue. The assumption that Enlightenment racialism is the starting point for a fixed concept of race has become a battleground for scholars and contemporary activists who confront the power of race in policy, policing, and public life. In accepting such a sharp distinction between fluid and fixed formulations of race, early modern race scholars can privilege protecting a notion of historical difference over contributing the unique tools we have for showing how the fluidity of race in the past can help us understand its tenacity, fluidity, and power today.

The narrow focus on fluidity can reinforce a tendency to approach race purely as an abstraction, thus ignoring the implications of living as a raced subject then and now as well as the political urgency many of us feel in doing this work. In a forthcoming essay, historian Jennifer L. Morgan revisits the story of Maria, "a proper Negro wench" captured along with an unnamed man from a Spanish ship during Sir Francis Drake's 1577 circumnavigation. While the *Pelican* and its accompanying ships headed back to London, Drake put Maria, "gotten with child between the captain and his men pirates," and two black men ashore on Crab Island, a deserted, uninhabitable place in the Indonesian Maluku archipelago. Morgan powerfully argues that "Maria's fragmented story suggests the entanglement of race, birth, captivity and the perverse geography of a racialized public" already in place in the sixteenth century, indeed at the heart of one of England's most enduring nationalist myths. Her study is part of a larger collection of historiographical works on early modern Atlantic slavery that, often in defiance of scholarly convention, explores questions of race, gender, and the subjectivities of people whose archival life is fragmentary and incomplete. This body of work suggests that using "fluidity" too freely can help gloss over the physical and psychological violence of race formation:

As she watched the ship recede from the shores of the tiny island, overrun with crabs and freakishly large bats, the awareness of all that Maria's pregnancy portended could not have escaped her. Maria's child signified no fluidity. Her body had become the explanatory vector for the violence meted out upon her, and the visible pregnancy, also wrenched from any familiar meaning it would have elicited a lifetime ago, became the catalyst for their collective abandonment. Drake's pretense that Maria would "populate the place" was stark in its unadulterated violence, but it was also prescient. It suggested that by the end of the sixteenth century, the connection between reproduction, a racialized notion of human disposability, and the possibilities of commoditized futurity were already accessible to Drake and his crew.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, "*Partus Sequitur Ventrem: Slave Law and the History of Women in Slavery*," unpublished paper presented at the "Empires of Capital: Race across the Atlantic and the Pacific" symposium, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, May 2013. All quotations are from this manuscript and appear with permission from the author.

Morgan's discussion of Maria should be a salutary reminder to early modernists that in conceding fluidity as the defining difference of early modern race we may be implicitly reproducing past violence as well as allowing a social justice perspective, which would be attentive to the presence of, perspectives on, and violence against marginalized peoples, to stop at the archive doors. Instead of insisting on fluidity as the defining difference between early modern race and now, scholars of early modern race should experiment with removing that concept from our critical repertoire and should insist that race, as an ideology that organizes human difference and power, is always protean and sticky, attaching to a range of ideologies, narratives, and vocabularies in ways both familiar and strange.

At the beginning of Drake's voyage, one sees the protection of Queen Elizabeth I's economic and political interests. In the face of well-documented performances of power by a queen whose iconography is already shaped by her whiteness and her defiance of reproductive norms, it is easy to forget Maria, a woman of African descent, who had no control over her body, reproductively or geographically, almost half a world away and who was, despite that distance, still subject to ideologies of gender, reproduction, property, and race operating in Elizabeth's London. Yet it is possible that she was not forgotten even in Shakespeare's time. For Shakespeareans, Maria's clearly problematic pregnancy foreshadows the unnamed pregnant Moor in *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that interweaves questions of economics, travel, and reproduction and that begins with the dangers of travel (for elite white men). To echo Ian Smith's question about Othello in this issue, what does it mean to identify with Maria? Perhaps it means noting that early moderns' interest in, and then abandonment of, people of color who do not serve their needs is similar to contemporary scholarship that asserts that "race" has had its day or to scholarship that silently leaves behind or erases concerns with race as soon as it becomes troublesomely (re)productive.

In an earlier nod to the future of early modern race studies, Ayanna Thompson points out, "It is possible to detect a certain anxiety about the relationship between early modern constructions of race, our own contemporary constructions of race, and the critics' own identity politics through the employment of prologues, forewords, afterwords, afterthoughts, and epilogues." She argues that the literal marginalization of these concerns "renders them separate and negligible and communicates an uncertainty about the relationship between the subject being analyzed and the subject performing the analysis."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ayanna Thompson, "The Future of Early Modern Race Studies: On Three Ambitious (Enough?) Books," *The Eighteenth Century* 49.3 (2008): 251–60, esp. 259.

Our seminar attempted to shift these complex questions from margin to center. Several of the papers answer Thompson’s call for more theoretical work on early modern race, and we encourage senior scholars in particular to move the complex relationship between identity politics and constructions of race then and now to the forefront of our work.

Evoking W. E. B. Dubois’s chapter on “Sorrow Songs” in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Derrick Bell argues, “With what some of us are calling critical race theory, we are attempting to sing a new scholarly song—even if to some listeners our style is strange, our lyrics unseemly.”<sup>27</sup> What you are hearing in this issue is a desire to sing a new scholarly song, to embrace our strange style and our unseemliness in the service of understanding how early moderns as well as contemporary peoples “apprehend and engage in the historical relations of power and violence that permeate their particular everyday.”<sup>28</sup> In pursuing Thompson’s astute activating of “passing strange” and the term’s multivalent meanings in the early modern English and contemporary American lexicon, we can refuse a scholarship that passes, that continues to identify with the confining assumptions of early modern scholarship, and that speaks only the language of our dominant culture. Instead, we can move to a new phase where we set our own questions and chose methods that embrace strangeness, that refuse an artificial border between past and present, and that listen to the voices of people of color.<sup>29</sup> Which is to say, expect to see more of us embracing the strange.

—PETER ERICKSON AND KIM F. HALL

<sup>27</sup> Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, 144. See also W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 167–77.

<sup>28</sup> Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See, “Introduction: A Sightline,” in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2016), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (2011; repr., Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 7–19.