History Hesitant

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Considering slavery and freedom in relation to the question of recovery and the archive invites inquiry into what is to be recovered and under what conditions.[1] This serious provocation gestures toward the promise of recovery yet sets this promise within the limits of an archive that authorizes knowledge about the history of slavery and freedom in terms of particular interests—those of slave owners and citizens, and not the enslaved—which denies enslaved people the humanity and presence it accords free liberal persons and society. To focus the inquiry on *recovery* mobilizes the different valences of the term: a sense of the retrieval of archival evidence and the restoration of historical presence, on the one hand, and the ontological and political sense of reparation, on the other, that is, the possibility of recuperation, or the repossession of a full humanity and freedom, after its ultimate theft or obliteration. Yet in framing recovery as a question, and not as an established project or tradition, the occasion not only underscores the contingency of recovery but also frames the reflection on recovery as a paradox. This paradox involves a divergence either between the affirmation of the recovered presence of enslaved people and the many terrains of freedom struggle, or the refusal of the temptations of recovery, owing to suspicions that not only modern positivist methods of historical recovery, but also the promises of liberal political enfranchisement to emancipate and redeem, risk subjecting the enslaved to the dominant terms under which they had so long suffered and within which they have been deemed lacking, indebted, or failed.

In this sense, we may affiliate the questioning of recovery, which combines the desire for freedom and a reckoning with the conditions of its foreclosure, with a longer tradition of African American social critique, from W. E. B. Du Bois's observations in *Black Reconstruction* (1935) that slavery was not an aberration of American democracy but its central con-

Social Text 125 · Vol. 33, No. 4 · December 2015
DOI 10.1215/01642472-3315790

tradiction, to Saidiya Hartman's critique in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), that abolition and political emancipation were inadequate to repair the catastrophes of nineteenth-century slavery: the violence of captivity, loss of homeland, expropriation of labor, corporal tortures and punishments, obliteration of kin and family, and social death.[2] We also associate the questioning of recovery with a black radical anticolonial tradition that calls for an interrogation of all existing social forms—of personhood, society, state, and history—from C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, and Frantz Fanon to Cedric Robinson, Angela Davis, Achille Mbembe, or Robin D. G. Kelley.[3] In James's *Black Jacobins* (1938), for example, the slaves' desire for freedom from colonial slavery in Saint-Domingue exceeds not only the French republican demand for the rights of man but also the given Marxist forms for dialectical progress toward revolutionary ends, bringing familiar historical and political categories radically into question. With respect to French rule in Algeria, Fanon described decolonization as "a program of complete disorder . . . a veritable creation of new men," an ongoing remaking of ethical, social, and political life that continues well beyond the capture of the colonial state by the national bourgeoisie, and beyond the promises of political emancipation through citizenship in the new postcolonial state.[4] This genealogy of black social critique is dedicated to the continuous interrogation of received formalisms for understanding history and politics, refusing the simple recovery of the past in the terms given by the present. A range of contemporary critics asks if one can even consider slavery a *past* condition; in light of the continuing captivity, expropriation, disposability, and fungibility of black communities, they ask if slavery can be treated as a historical object that is completed or overcome, from which recovery would be possible.[5] Achille Mbembe has observed that one of the tragedies of colonialism in Africa is the erasure of African multiplicity (of languages, religions, histories, social forms) by "the paradigm of 'the one.'" He interrogates the temporality of recovery by invoking the multiplicity of Africa and suggests that the African contribution to the future world takes place "under the sign of the multiple."[6] Observing the persistence of enduring racial inequality after the end of South African apartheid and US civil rights in *Meaning of Freedom* (2012), Angela Davis points to the enormous obstacles presented by racial liberalism and "post-racialism"—the twentieth-century claims that civil rights have ended racism—which mask the complex ways that racism has refortified within neoliberalism, in free market fundamentalism, the end of social welfare, and the buildup of prison industries. The phrase *questioning recovery*, then, names a broad critical project that scrutinizes the present as both aftermath and continuity and calls attention to the conditions of slavery and colonialism that infuse the conditions, memories, and possibilities of the present. It foregrounds the persistence of unfreedom

belying liberal narratives of progress that would triumphantly declare the present a time of freedom and asserts instead that the present is a time in which emancipation has not yet occurred, in which freedom is still yet to come.[7]

Posing this question of recovery, then, in relation to the archive provides an occasion to query into under what conditions, and in relation to what materials, the conditions of unfreedom can be examined. Out of what materials and on which terrains can the still desired freedom be struggled for and imagined? The relation to the archive calls our attention to matters of both critical method and evidence. With reference to national or imperial state collections, it points to a scholarly and political practice that reads such records not with the aim of recovering a presence but, rather, to study the archaeology of knowledge through which the archive subjects and governs precisely by means of instruments that absent the humanity of the enslaved. Whether congressional debates, parliamentary records, and colonial office papers or traders' ledgers, plantation accounts, and slaveholders' diaries, memoirs, and journals, one may examine these documents in which slave life is foreclosed, not as stable, transparent collections of facts, but as the very technologies of governance for knowing and administering the enslaved peoples, which embody materials that both attest to the system's contradictions and yield its critique.[8] As a material record of dehumanization, and the historical trace of the notorious system's logic and practice, such archives can be read for the way in which they mediate not merely the violence but also the instability of slavery. That is, one reads how the records of slavery actively document and produce the perilous contradictions and uncertainties that were its conditions: the ownership and trade in human beings, forced labor, denial of personhood and production of social death, and suppression of revolt and rebellion. It is in this sense that Hartman describes reading the official archive as "entering a mortuary; it permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold."[9] She suggests if it is not possible to undo this archival violence, perhaps reading for the silences and scarcity of narratives may provide possible forms of redress.[10]

Apart from actual papers and collections, the archive is also a way of referring to epistemological parameters for knowing, reading, and making legible the conditions of slavery and its aftermath; it conjures the possibilities and limits of knowledge. Even the most eloquent Black Atlantic or African American slave narratives—by Ottobah Cugoano, Mary Prince, Harriet Jacobs, or Frederick Douglass—provide accounts of slavery and the struggle for freedom, yet are limited by the archive and the conditions of possibility within which they could be read and written. Many colonies criminalized the teaching of enslaved people to read and write, and the

publication of the slave narrative depended upon the white abolitionist editor and white reading public.[11] I observe elsewhere of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) that its canonization by abolitionists William Wilberforce and others disciplines Equiano's slave narrative within the liberal genre of autobiography. The former slave comes to possess the meaning of slavery as the past out of which his modern freedom emerges, exemplifying the temporality of liberal historicism in which individual freedom is distilled out of the heteronomous collective subjectivity of colonial slavery.[12]

Owing to these limits, the matter of slavery and freedom turns some away from official archives to explore and create alternative archives—from cultural practices, artifacts, or ephemera of African American social life to black expressive arts of poetry, dance, visual culture, or music—that provide other versions of personhood and society, history and justice, and pleasure and possibility. Recent studies of African American and Black Atlantic slavery employ both the critical consultation of dominant archives and the innovative investigation or presentation of alternative materials. In *Saltwater Slavery* (2007), for example, Stephanie Smallwood reads the ledgers, accounts, letters, and memoranda of the Royal African Company "not to create—out of the remnants of ledgers and ships' logs, walls and chains—'the way it really was' for the newly arrived slave waiting to be sold . . . but to interpret, from the slave trader's disinterest in the slave's pain, those social conditions within which there was no possible political resolution to that pain."[13] She examines the slave trader's desire to record, measure, list, and account, in order to observe the failures of these rationalist claims to produce truth or meaning about the terrors of captivity, enslavement, or torture, or the resilient acts of survival; she argues that in this way the archive nonetheless unwittingly reveals something about the slaves' experience of the traffic in human beings and the life aboard the slave ship. Vividly evoking the social force and vitality of Jamaican slave life, Vincent Brown, in *Reaper's Garden* (2010), interprets the burial rites, funeral music, and commemorative practices of Jamaican slaves, as well as demographic data, British travel narratives, and planter and slaveholder diaries. Furthermore, Brown's multilayered, interactive digital project, *Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760–1761: A Cartographic Narrative*, maps eighteen months of the largest slave revolt and its suppression. Drawing from a historical record largely written by colonists and imperial officials unsympathetic to the rebellion, Brown's plotting of the slave rebels' movements across the island presents a dynamic, visual portrait that permits us to see the persistence, intelligence, and ingenuity of slave rebellions, as well as the determined British counterinsurgency.

The consideration of the question of recovery in relation to the

archive of slavery and freedom further suggests that while accounts of African American and Black Atlantic slavery are central to understanding enslavement and the terrains of struggles for freedom, the inquiry into slavery and freedom also requires a critical examination of the genealogy of freedom itself. That is, the concept of freedom is not self-evident; it was and is both fragile and contested in relation to the varieties of communities it affirms, disciplines, and divides. In my own work, I suggest that liberal forms of political economy, culture, subject, state, and society propose a narrative of freedom overcoming enslavement that at once denies colonial slavery, erases the seizure of lands from native peoples, and develops freedoms for man in modern Europe and North America, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilized, and unfree. The history of modernity is, in one sense, a history of liberal forms monopolizing the meaning of freedom for the human and denying it to others placed at a distance from the human. Race and other forms of social difference are the enduring remainders of these processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the people who created the conditions of possibility for those freedoms are forcibly assimilated, or forgotten.

I approach the work of unsettling this genealogy of freedom by reading across different canons, archives, and continents to argue that the archive of liberalism—the literary, cultural, and political philosophical narratives of progress and individual freedom that perform the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism's contradictions—can be productively read alongside colonial state archives, and with the antislavery and anticolonial intellectual traditions seldom considered alongside the imperial one. The liberal claims that slavery is over and that political freedom has been fought for and attained continue to inform the historiography of abolition, the transition from slavery to free labor, and US civil rights; these ideas are widespread in public culture itself. For this reason, there is a continuing need to understand the conditions within which the liberal narrative of freedom overcoming slavery has been established in European and North American political and economic spheres, through discourses of emancipation, citizenship, free labor, and free trade. The history of slavery and freedom must also be concerned with understanding the conditions in which the concept of freedom emerged and was contested and, moreover, how the desire for promised freedom came to discipline and organize varieties of social subjects, which include those enslaved, those enfranchised, and those not or never to be, who are nonetheless represented as free or recruited to identify with this rubric of freedom.

In my 2015 book *Intimacies of Four Continents* I contribute to this discussion of slavery and freedom by joining scholars and critics who

observe that liberal freedom did not contradict slavery but, rather, served precisely as a means to rationalize and implement slavery and its aftermath. By investigating the obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, on the one hand, and settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, on the other hand, perhaps the more unusual observation I offer is that many of the liberal concepts that were used to justify slavery were also employed differently at other times to justify settler occupation, theft of land, imperial war, and overseas empire. The liberal narrative of freedom overcoming slavery not only masks the persistent lack of freedom for the formerly enslaved, but liberal claims of abolition and emancipation are also connected to shifts in the modes, scale, and strategies of Anglo-American empire, particularly in Asia. I argue that liberal rights to property, political emancipation, free trade, sovereignty, and liberal governance emerged out of colonial slavery and colonial encounters and that liberal ideas were themselves a means to resolve, administer, and manage the contradictions of slavery and colonialism. In this way, the uses of liberalism to advance colonialism, slavery, and empire oblige us not only to read the archive of liberalism with the archive of slavery but also to connect them with the materials on settler colonialism, Native removal, racialized immigration, war, and military occupation. Reading together different archives, customarily collected and interpreted separately, reveals the relevance of settler colonialism in North America and the West Indies, the colonization of Africa and Asia, and the trades in Asian goods and peoples to the study of slavery and freedom. I use the term *intimacies of four continents* to describe the simultaneous yet differentiated processes that link Asia, Africa, and Europe with the Americas and suggest that we risk losing the particularity of each historical and ongoing process if, on the one hand, we render them analogous or equal to one another or if, on the other, the emphasis on particularity insists on the exclusive elevation of one history and the erasure of others. Finally, I suggest that in order to account for differentiated yet simultaneous colonial histories and modalities, we must retire the convention of comparison as an operation that presumes equivalences between discrete analogous units, in order to be able to think differently—politically, historically, and ethically—about the important asymmetries of contact, encounter, convergence, and solidarity.

When reading connections and conjunctions across archives and geographies, it is often necessary to break with customary modes for organizing history and to devise other ways of reading beyond the given presumptions of a rational, synthetic system, a developmental teleology, or symmetries of cause and effect. My inquiries into the history of slavery and freedom question recovery to the extent that the project of recovery

often confirms or upholds the dominant histories we receive of liberal modernity: those of the transition from slavery to freedom, the progress of industrialization and wage labor, the commencement of free trade after mercantilism, or the establishment of liberal democracy through representative government. Instead, I combine unlike texts, places, scales, and operations to attend to the absent or overlooked and to specify different moments of coloniality operating as the discipline, subjugation, and organization of peoples into normative forms of subject, society, and state. I consider how coloniality has shaped the knowledge received about those processes and the limits of what can be thought and imagined. Among the convergences I consider in *Intimacies of Four Continents* is the imbrication of the British Slave Trade Act of 1807, the introduction of Asian contract workers to the West Indies, free wage labor, and the colonization of Sierra Leone. I also examine the conjunction of the 1833 Act that legally ended slavery in the British Empire, with the termination of the British East India Company monopoly in China, and the commencement of free trade. A third convergence I examine is liberal colonial governance of post–Opium War treaty ports in China and the new Crown Colony of Hong Kong, the trade in Chinese emigrant laborers, and the expansion of the Manchester cotton industry that depended upon raw cotton and slave labor on plantations in the US South.

As modern liberalism defined the human and universalized its attributes to European man, it simultaneously differentiated peoples in the colonies as less than human. Even as it proposes inclusivity, liberal universalism effects principles of inclusion and exclusion; in the very claim to define humanity, as a species or as a condition, its gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, classify the normative, and pathologize deviance.[14] Universalizing concepts of reason, civilization, and freedom divide humanity according to a coloniality of power, affirming freedom for modern man while subordinating the colonized, enslaved, and dispossessed whose material labors and resources were the conditions of possibility for that liberty.[15] These processes that comprise the fifteenth-century "discovery" of the "new world" consolidate themselves through modern liberal political economy and culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We see the longevity of colonial divisions of humanity in our contemporary moment, in which the human life of citizens protected by the state is bound to the denigration of populations cast in violation of human life, set outside of human society.[16] Furthermore, while violence characterizes exclusion from the universality of the human, it also accompanies inclusion or assimilation into it. Such violence leaves a trace, which returns and unsettles the apparent closure of the liberal politics, society, and culture that establishes the universal. The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of racialized colonial dif-

ference, which designates the boundaries of the human and endures as a remainder attesting to the violence of liberal universality.

During the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered. We can link the emergence of liberties defined in the abstract terms of citizenship, rights, wage labor, free trade, and sovereignty with the attribution of racial difference to those subjects, regions, and populations that liberal doctrine describes as unfit for liberty or incapable of civilization, placed at the margins of liberal humanity. Settlers represented indigenous peoples as violent threats to be eliminated in ways that rationalized white settlement and African slavery; they discounted native people as uncivilized or non-Christians, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past. Colonial administrators and traders cast captive Africans as inhuman chattel, as enslaveable property. Colonial governors conceived the Chinese as a plentiful, tractable form of labor that could alternately oppose, replace, or supplement slavery; colonial police and criminal courts represented the Chinese as diseased addicts, degenerate vagrants, and prostitutes. These distinctly situated yet connected colonial racial logics emerged as parts of what was in the nineteenth century an emergent Anglo-American settler imperial imaginary, which continues to be elaborated today, casting differentiated peoples across the globe in relation to liberal ideas of civilized personhood and human freedom.[17] The safekeeping and preservation of liberal society and the placement of peoples at various distances from liberal humanity are thus integral parts of the genealogy of modern liberalism. Differentiated racial classifications shift in relation to specific conditions and articulate different colonial projects and operations, as well as complex intersections of social difference.[18]

Moreover, not only are different colonial projects connected and interdependent, but also settler logics of primitive accumulation and elimination endure and are rearticulated within the practices of slavery and indenture. Strategies elaborated in slavery, such as possession, property, and profit through deterritorialization and dehumanization, are rearticulated to form the modus operandi of empire and racial capitalism.[19] The operations that pronounce colonial divisions of humanity—settler seizure and native removal, slavery and racial dispossession, and racialized expropriations of many kinds—are imbricated processes, not sequential events; they are ongoing and continuous in our contemporary moment, not temporally distinct or as yet concluded. In this sense, the coloniality of world history is not a single brute event but, rather, one that governs and calibrates being and society in an ongoing way, through spatial and temporal

operations of inclusivity and exclusivity, and through both geographical and historical differentiation and connection.[20]

Political rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade that have become part of our normative understanding of liberal political reason are embedded within racial divisions and colonial asymmetries, conditions upon which the liberal tradition depends and according to which such liberties are reserved for some and denied to others. In the classic liberal political narratives, the move from the state of nature to political society has justified the need to contain the natural condition of war in which human life and property interests are threatened by violence. Liberal government is said to secure the peaceful conditions of individual and collective security by transferring the violence of the state of nature to the political state, executed through laws that protect subjects within civil society and that racialize other peoples as the very limit of that body. In *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), for example, Locke's natural law would seem to grant native people's rightful possession of the land on which they lived and labored, yet his theory of property justified English settlement in the right to "appropriate any parcel of *Land*, by improving it" and justified war in the provision that "everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of the law . . . to preserve the innocent and restrain offenders."[21] After leaving the state of nature to form a political society, Locke maintains the liberal citizen's right "to destroy a Man who makes War upon him," as Native American people were regularly represented.[22] Liberal theories of property portrayed lands in the "new world" as if they were vacant, insufficiently cultivated, or uninhabited by Christian civilized persons, central tropes employed to dispossess indigenous peoples of their lands.[23] Because ongoing settler projects of seizure, removal, and elimination are neither analogous to the history and afterlife of racial slavery nor akin to the racialized exploitation of displaced migrant labor, the discussion of settler colonialism cannot simply be folded into discussions of race without reckoning with its differences. In other words, liberalism consists of a multifaceted, flexible, and contradictory set of provisions that rationalizes settler appropriation and removal differently than it justifies either the subjection of human beings as enslaved property or the extraction of labor from indentured emigrants, however much these processes share a colonial past and an ongoing colonial present. Histories of indigeneity, slavery, industry, occupation, and immigration give rise to differentially situated, not equivalent, genealogies of liberalism.

Liberal rights to property and commerce were also employed to justify the slave trade and the ownership of slaves. The correspondence of colonial administrators, slave traders, and company agents is replete with statements that affirmed their rights to own and trade human beings,

designated as chattel and cargo, without reckoning with the system of enslavement that depended on violence, violation, and dehumanization. The seventeenth-century traveler Richard Ligon wrote, "They Choose them as they do horses in a market."[24] Smallwood analyzes the brutal transformation of African persons into commodities, arguing that being owned as property was the idiom that defined the slaves' new condition, replacing kinship and location as the defining glue that bound person to society.[25] In her discussion of the 1662 law of *partus sequitur ventrem* dictating that the children of slave women inherited the mother's status as slaves, Jennifer L. Morgan observes how definitions of law and property were used to legislate the most intimate spheres of relations among enslaved persons, making slave women's bodies the most vulnerable sites within colonial slavery's permanent state of exception, as they were forced to reproduce kinlessness.[26] Hartman observes that, because slaves were not civic persons but dehumanized property, slavery founded the conditions of possibility for liberal civil society to emerge, reproducing black exile from individual will, domesticity, and social recognition even in the aftermath of so-called emancipation.[27]

By the late eighteenth century, abolitionists employed liberal principles to argue for the political emancipation of slaves as well. Christian abolitionists in England submitted that slavery was cruel and immoral and that its end was necessary for a just, humanitarian English society.[28] Black British abolitionists were often persuaded to articulate their opposition to slavery in similar terms.[29] Yet while such arguments brought economic and political reforms to England, they failed to curtail the slave trade, and conditions of enslavement persisted for former slaves far beyond so-called emancipation.[30] Abstract notions of individual rights neither removed social barriers nor included the material means necessary to fulfill the promised freedoms, and liberal abolitionist arguments were less important to passage of the Slave Trade Act, or the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, than were the dramatic revolts and everyday practices of enslaved peoples themselves.

Arguments for abolition and free labor were also employed in the plan to rationalize the importing of Chinese indentured labor to the West Indian colonies. In an 1803 "Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company," colonial administrators outlined the plan to import the "free race" of "freely contracted" Chinese laborers to work in the West Indian island of Trinidad, to "provide security against" "the spirit of insurrection being excited amongst the Negroes in our colonies."[31] The secret commission to obtain Chinese laborers suggests that the decisions to end the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in the empire in 1833, were equally pragmatic attempts to prevent black revolution (in the wake of slave revolts across

the West Indies) and to create new forms of labor, profit, and empire that brought together colonial slavery in the West Indies and imperial forms of labor and trade in Asia.[32] The British abolition of slavery and the end of the East India Company monopoly were represented as inaugurating a transition from slavery to freedom. However, to the contrary, this linear conception of historical progress—in which the slavery of the past would be overcome and replaced by modern freedom—concealed the persistence of enslavement and dispossession for the enslaved and indentured, as well as the new British-led imperial forms of trade and governance expanding across Asia, Africa, and the Americas under the liberal rubric of free trade.

Following the promises of abolition, emancipation, and free wage labor, liberal ideas of freedom were then employed in the expansion of British dominion through the opening of free trade with China. In 1829–30, John Stuart Mill wrote "Of the Laws of Interchange between Nations," an essay on free trade that would make one of the most significant additions to David Ricardo's law of comparative advantage.[33] Ricardo had argued that in the trade between two countries, if each country produced the commodity in the production of which it enjoyed a comparative advantage, the total production would be increased, stressing that the costs of production determined comparative advantage.[34] Mill modified Ricardo's theory, adding that it was not only the costs of production but also the demand for the good, and the cost of acquiring it, that determined comparative advantage. In other words, the value of an import, such as tea, was not decided exclusively by what it cost the Chinese to produce; rather, the import's value on the market was affected by British demand and by the British cost to produce the thing that was exported to pay for the tea, in other words, the cost of producing opium in India for export to China.[35] Tea imports had accounted, by the end of the eighteenth century, for more than 60 percent of the East India Company's trade.[36] Once the company's trade in opium surged in the 1820s and 1830s, opium became the largest single British traded commodity in China. Mill's revision of Ricardo's laws of international trade may well have described the British colonial strategy that had successfully balanced the China tea trade by increasing the British import of India-manufactured opium to China.[37]

Mercantilist strategy was based on a zero-sum fiction, in which companies aimed to accumulate gold and silver bullion through controlling production in the colonies, monopolizing industries, and seeking a positive balance of trade.[38] Increasing competition for trade in the Americas, India, and China gradually gave rise to a new economic rationality that suggested trade was not finite, not zero sum. The British abolition of the slave trade and the end of the East India Company's monopoly in India and China facilitated free trade that permitted expansion of the trades

in Asia and elaborated the powers of the British over most of the world's trade routes.[39] The First Opium War (1839–42) compelled the Chinese to comply with this free trade credo that ushered in new forms of liberal colonial governance in Hong Kong and the treaty ports that relied less upon the model of territorial occupation and plantation economy exercised in the Americas and more upon the management and control of overseas trade and deterritorialized population in Asia. The strategies that became regular parts of the governance of both Hong Kong and the Chinese treaty ports until the century's end included compulsory registration, police buildup, criminalization of transient populations, racialization of sexuality, and a military state of exception to command the seas.

In the Hong Kong colony, founded in 1842 after the First Opium War, British administrators appeared preoccupied with the constantly shifting nature of Hong Kong's early Chinese populations, and successive governments created laws to prosecute vagrants and transients in the early years of colonial rule, at a time when vagrancy laws criminalized fugitive slaves in the United States and outlawed and punished the indigent poor and homeless in other parts of the world. Large groups of people had been displaced from southern China in the wake of the war and the beginnings of the Taiping Rebellion. The commercialization of the rural economy created land and food shortages for many southern Chinese and dislocated peasants who migrated from Canton (Guangdong) and Fukien (Fujian) to Hong Kong.[40] The second governor, Sir John Francis Davis, passed nearly twenty ordinances each year legislating different forms of Chinese vagrancy, requiring compulsory registration of persons, policing of social spaces, and inspection of bodies, all of which regulated the colonial difference of the Chinese. Liberal political philosophy furnished the utilitarian and humanitarian rationales for these imperial innovations; Mill's classic *Considerations on Representative Government*, for example, famously defined "the best government" as that which discerned those who were "unfit for liberty" or not capable of self-determination. He wrote that despotism was "a necessary medicine for diseases of the body politic which could not be rid of by less violent means."[41] Mill's treatise on liberal government was as much a provision for the colonial state's necessary use of force to "maintain order and progress" as it was a blueprint for democratic representation. In Hong Kong, Chinese were required to carry a registration card at all times and faced imprisonment or deportation if not registered. Other ordinances criminalized a wide variety of activities, including loitering, violating curfew, petty theft, gambling, or simply being caught on the street without a registration card. By 1848, the police possessed the authority to arrest any Chinese in Hong Kong for virtually any reason. In these ordinances regarding piracy and vagrancy, we have a record of how the state produced colonial racial difference and

monopolized violence against the potential uprisings of the colonized.[42] By the late 1840s, a large Chinese population displaced by the war was criminalized as vagrant, producing the migrant "coolies" who embarked from Hong Kong to the West Indies, Cuba, Latin America, Australia, South Africa, the western United States, and Hawaii.[43]

Thus, the liberal experiment that began with abolition and emancipation continued with the development of free wage labor as a utilitarian discipline for freed slaves and contract laborers in the colonies, as well as the English workforce at home, and then expanded British empire through opening free trade and the development of liberal government. The new imperial sovereignty that operated in the post–Opium War Chinese treaty ports and in the China Sea was intimately connected to the shifts in colonial labor relations in the colonized Americas, including the decision to end the slave trade and introduce Asian contract labor in the Americas. Free circulation with the rule of law was the hallmark of liberal reason that characterized the new imperial governmentality whose dominion employed both captivity and the command of trade and population to maintain the security of the empire. Empire across continents consisted in the power to adapt and improvise combinations of slavery and residual colonialism with new forms of nominally free yet coerced migrant labor. It refined methods for profit that drew from practices resembling both monopoly and free trade, and it employed an older-style colonial rule with new forms of security and biopower to govern free movement outside and beyond directly occupied territories. Freedom linked the transatlantic world of plantation slavery to the expansion of colonial trades and brokered emigration in the treaty ports, constituting the conditions of possibility for the unprecedented imperial dominance of British empire by the end of the nineteenth century, and the succession of it by the United States in the twentieth.

I began my piece by reflecting on the particular ways in which questioning recovery in relation to slavery, freedom, and the archive draws significantly from the tradition of black social critique that not only remains suspicious of liberal promises of freedom but also brings this suspicion to bear on the interrogation of the historical modes that uphold the present social order. This critique acknowledges not only that history and historical knowledge fix and structure the relationship of the past to the present but also that the meaning it attributes to the past determines what might be imagined as possible, just, or desirable, now and in the future. With respect to this critique, I observe that slavery and colonialism are not just the conditions of possibility for the liberal monopoly on freedom—whose vehicles are political emancipation, wage labor, free trade, and liberal government—but that liberal history and epistemology do the work of obfuscating these connections. I discuss liberalism as a formalism that

translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom. The differentiations of race and nation, the geopolitical designations south, north, east, and west, and the attributions of fitness for life or death, modernity or extinction—these are all traces of liberalism's affirmation and forgetting. Projects addressing slavery and colonialism have long been concerned to recover lost histories, of peoples, activities, and events erased or rendered unintelligible within the categories and narratives privileged by official accounts and archives. Yet in privileging recovery one risks reproducing the very forms of violent erasure that are the signature of the regime of liberal freedom. Therefore, I do not move immediately toward recovery or recuperation but, rather, pause to reflect on what it means to supplement forgetting with new narratives of affirmation and presence. Hesitation, rather than rushing to recover what has been lost, need not be understood as inaction or postponement, or as a thwarting of the wish to provide for a future world. Rather, it halts the desire for recognition by the present social order and staves off the compulsion to make visible within current epistemological orthodoxy. We might recall that Du Bois begins and concludes *Black Reconstruction* with allusions to the necessity of "that dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States,"[44] even as the formidable task of telling the story of black freedom struggles during the US Civil War and Reconstruction did not permit him to pursue these connections. His text frames "that dark and vast sea of human labor" as a recognition across continents that could have been, which might still challenge the consolidation of capitalism on a global scale that the suppression of black freedom made possible. *Black Reconstruction* is an eloquent, impressive index of how the narrative of antislavery history acknowledges these "intimacies of four continents" yet situates them beyond its scope, as necessary but still to come. Hesitation may provide a space, a different temporality, so that we may attend to the meanings of *slavery* and *freedom* in our critical projects and reckon with the connections that could have been but were lost and are thus not yet—before we conceive the freedoms yet to come.

Notes

1. My title follows W. E. B. Du Bois's 1905 essay "Sociology Hesitant," first published in a special issue of *boundary 2* edited by Ronald A. T. Judy. My thanks to Saidiya Hartman for this reference. The heralding of Du Bois as a modern sociologist has left little room to appreciate that Du Bois wrote also about the limits of positivist methods; *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899) still stands as one of the greatest sociological studies of the African American condition. Yet in "Sociology Hesitant," a relatively unknown essay, Du Bois expresses skepticism about the impo-

sition of abstract concepts and writes of positivist sociology as "something so wrong" because it conceived "this new created Thing Society" as "an object of scientific study and induction that reduce[s] human action to law, rule, and rhythm" (39–40). Du Bois wrote: "Three things at the birth of the New Age bear weighty testimony to an increased and increasing interest in human deeds: the Novel, the Trust, and the Expansion of Europe; the study of individual life and motive, the machine-like organizing of human economic effort, and the extension of all organization to the ends of the earth. Is there a fairer field than this for the Scientist? Did not the Master Comte do well to crown his scheme of knowledge with Knowledge of Men?" (38). In his criticism of Auguste Comte's "scheme of knowledge," Du Bois identifies three iconic formal elements that characterize Western modernity for sociological "science": the novel, or the aesthetic genre for the narration of bourgeois personhood, interiority, civility, and domesticity; the trust, or the legal corporate ownership of property; and European expansion, executed, as Du Bois elaborates, through the extension of industrial capitalism, social organization, and scientific rationalism "to the ends of the earth." Du Bois implies that not only are national bourgeois society, property, the corporation, and the rationalizing logics of capitalism the very concepts through which the sociology of Western modernity is studied, but also that it is by means of these abstractions that Western knowledge becomes a formal means for conquest and subjection of peoples across the globe. In his introduction to "Sociology Hesitant," Judy suggests that the essay remained unpublished and misidentified because it was misunderstood in its time, due in part to its focus on aporia, "a figure of the fundamental irreducibility and undecidability of concepts or phenomena" (11).

2. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

3. James, *Black Jacobins*; Rodney, *History of the Guyanese Working People*; Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Davis, *Meaning of Freedom*; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.

4. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 35–36.

5. See, e.g., Childs, *Slaves of the State*; Hesse, "Escaping Liberty"; Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacy*; Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.

6. Blaser, "Africa and the Future."

7. See Hartman, "Time of Slavery."

8. See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*; Said, *Orientalism*; Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance"; and Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

9. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 17.

10. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3.

11. See Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*; Stepto, *From behind the Veil*; Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*; Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope."

12. Lowe, "Autobiography out of Empire."

13. Smallwood, conversation with the author, 2003.

14. See Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*; see also Butler, *Precarious Life*.

15. On coloniality of power, see Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept"; on the coloniality of Western humanism, see Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," and McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*.

16. See Williams, *Divided World*; Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*; Hua, *Trafficking Women's Human Rights*; Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence*; and Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*.

17. Perhaps no work better illustrates the colonial divisions of humanity that operate in the modern narrative of freedom than Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837), in which he advanced the famous definition of world history

as a hierarchy of civilizations: "We can discern three main principles in the older continents: the Far Eastern (that is, Mongolian, Chinese, or Indian) principle, which is also the first to appear in history; the Mohammedan world, in which the principle of the abstract spirit, of monotheism is already present, although it is coupled with unrestrained arbitrariness; and the Christian, Western European world, in which the highest principle of all, the spirit's recognition of itself and its own profundity, is realized" (129). Yet as Hegel discussed world history as these successive "stages" progressing from East to West, and from less to more universal development and actualization of spirit, he famously exempted Africa as "an unhistorical continent, with no movement or development of its own" (190) and represented indigenous people of the New World as already destroyed: "Culturally inferior nations . . . eroded through contact with more advanced nations which have gone through a more intensive cultural development" (164). Thus, even as developmental history and ontology of comprehensive intelligibility provided for colonial subsumption of Asia and the Mediterranean, it situated African and indigenous people as differently external to the project of realizing human freedom. In this sense, what we understand as the colonial division of humanity, or colonial difference, is not a fixed binary distinction; it operates precisely through various modes of spatial differentiation and temporal development, affirming some and forgetting others while flexibly designating fitness for liberty, capacity for production, and placement in historical development, contemporaneity, or extinction. Discourses of freedom isolate distinct colonial operations and render unavailable these "intimacies of four continents" that were its conditions of possibility.

18. Transnational feminisms and feminisms of color conceive racial differences as inseparable from gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and religion, within national societies, and within a global framework. See, e.g., Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*; Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*; Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*; Mohanty and Alexander, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*; Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy"; Hong, *Ruptures of American Capital*; Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*; Gore, Theoharis, and Woodard, *Want to Start a Revolution?*; Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*; Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*; and El-Tayeb, *European Others*.

19. On racial capitalism, see Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

20. See Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism"; Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment*; Goldberg, *Racist Culture*; Mills, *Racial Contract*; and Hesse, "Racialized Modernity."

21. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 271.

22. Ibid., 279. See Armitage, "John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two Treatises of Government*"; Arneil, "Wild Indian's Venison"; Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*; Lepore, *Name of War*; and Bruyneel, *Third Space of Sovereignty*.

23. The liberal rationale for settler colonialism, in which settler conquest sought to eliminate or assimilate indigenous people and appropriate their lands, differs from the liberal economic provisions for modern colonial projects that focused on the extraction of resources and exploitation of labor. For this reason, indigenous studies scholars rework Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, or the process of dispossessing the producer from the means of production, to describe an organizing principle of settler colonialism yet redefine the concept to emphasize its ongoing persistence and transformation, through history and into contemporary capitalism. See, e.g., Coulthard, "From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?"; and Goldstein, "Where the Nation Takes Place," which specifies that so-called primitive accumulation as not primitive but an ongoing condition: "It is not so much an

'event' or a static relationship as *a condition of possibility* that remains formative while also changing over time" (835). Goldstein builds on Patrick Wolfe's statement that settler colonialism is a structure, not an event, whose logic of elimination destroys to replace; see Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." See also Brown, "Logic of Settler Accumulation."

Specifying the historical and ongoing appropriation of indigenous lands, knowledges, and histories, indigenous studies scholars urge a critical analysis of colonial capitalism that differs from those that center racial slavery or racialized labor. Glen Coulthard, in "From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?" argues that we shift the analysis from proletarianization to dispossession. Shona N. Jackson, in *Creole Indigeneity*, argues that privileging labor in anticolonial nationalist Caribbean discourses prescribes a normative anticolonial subject who labors rather than one who is dispossessed; affirming labor as the basis of humanity erases the history of settler colonialism while reproducing the myth of extinction that obscures the ongoing survival of indigenous peoples in the Caribbean. Jodi Byrd, in *Transit of Empire*, argues that, while racialization and colonization are concomitant systems, subsuming settler colonialism to racial difference, as if native difference constituted merely another racial group, reproduces the structure of settler colonialism.

24. Ligon, *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*.

25. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 61; see also Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

26. Morgan, "*Partus Sequitur Ventrem*."

27. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*; Singh, *Black Is a Country*; and Childs, *Slaves of the State*.

28. Wilberforce, *Speech of Mr. Wilberforce*, and Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity*. See also Kitson, *Abolition Debate*, and Lee, *Emancipation Debate*.

29. See Wedderburn, *Horrors of Slavery*, and Prince, *History of Mary Prince*.

30. See Cooper, Holt, and Scott, *Beyond Slavery*; Holt, *Problem of Freedom*; and Eudell, *Political Language of Emancipation*.

31. The 1803 text reads: "The events which have recently happened at St. Domingo necessarily awakes all those apprehensions which the establishment of a Negro government in that land gave rise to some years ago, and render it indispensable that every . . . precaution should be adopted to guard the British possessions in the West Indies as well against . . . the danger of a spirit of insurrection being excited amongst the Negroes in our colonies. . . . no measure would so effectually tend to provide a security against this, as that of introducing a free race of cultivators into our islands, who, from habits and feelings could be kept distinct from the Negroes, and who from interest would be inseparably attached to the European proprietors. . . . The Chinese people . . . unite the qualities which constitute this double recommendation." Colonial Office Papers (hereafter CO) 295, vol. 17.

32. For correspondence surrounding the introduction of the first Chinese workers into Trinidad in 1807 and correspondence from 1850–53, see CO 885, vol. 1/20; see also records from 1860–62, CO 111, vol. 327; records from 1861–63, CO 111, vol. 334; and discussions of the Chinese Passenger Act of 1855, Foreign Office Papers 97, vol. 101, Great Britain National Archives, London. Secondary literature on indentured labor in the Americas includes Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*; Helly, Introduction to *Cuba Commission Report*; Kale, *Fragments of Empire*; Jung, *Coolies and Cane*; and Yun, *Coolie Speaks*. On native peoples in the Caribbean, see Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*; Hulme, *Remnants of Conquest*; Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans*; and Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*. On the slave trade and the global economy, see Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*; Tomich, *Through the Prism of*

Slavery; and Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*.

33. Mill wrote "Of the Laws of Interchange between Nations" in 1829–30 but published it in 1844 as the first essay in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*.

34. Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*.

35. Mill had a thirty-five-year career working in the Examiner's Office of the East India Company, from 1823 to 1858. See Mill, *Autobiography*, and Mill, *Writings on India*.

36. "Export Trade from Great Britain to the East Indies," in *First, Second and Third Reports of the Select Committee, Appointed by the Court of Directors of East India Company*, House of Commons Select Committee Reports (hereafter HCSC).

37. In 1856, Mill was appointed the chief examiner of Indian correspondence, heading the office in which he had worked for thirty years as first assistant. In this position, Mill authored several of the most important defenses of East India Company rule presented to Parliament, including the *Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India during the Last Thirty Years*, which details the company's accomplishments in revenues, education, public works, and in building police and military forces to maintain social order; the *Memorandum* is a virtual manual on the constitution of effective colonial government, before the final Government of India Act of 1858 dissolved the East India Company. Mill, as both liberal philosopher and East India Company administrator, mediated his social and historical context, as an organic intellectual of British imperialism.

38. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* developed this critique of mercantilism adversely affecting economic growth.

39. *First, Second and Third Reports of the Select Committee, Appointed by the Court of Directors of East India Company* (1793), HCSC; *Papers respecting the negociation for a renewal of the East-India Company's exclusive trade* (1793), HCSC; *Reports from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company China Trade* (1830), HCSC; *Reports from the Select Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Present State of the East India Company, together with the minutes of evidence, appendix of documents, and a general index* (1830), HCSC; *Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords Appointed to Enquire into the present state of the East India Company, and into the trade between Great Britain, the East Indies, and China, together with the minutes of evidence, and an appendix* (1830), House of Lords Select Committee Reports, British Library, London.

40. See Tsai, *Hong Kong in Chinese History*, and Munn, *Anglo-China*.

41. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 403.

42. Ordinance 16 of October 1844 first created a registry for all island inhabitants, European and Chinese alike, but within two months Ordinance 18 of 1844 repealed Ordinance 16, restricting registration to the Chinese only and establishing a census for English and European residents. The new ordinance explicitly names the racial dimension of the criminalization of the Chinese and puts the earlier registry under erasure. Hong Kong: Acts, CO 130, vol. 2.

43. Tsai, *Hong Kong in Chinese History*; Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*; see also Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*.

44. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 15.

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