

CHRISTOPHER M. BLAKLEY

Historicizing the “Beast-Man”

On Slavery and Human-Animal Studies

ABSTRACT This essay surveys the emergence and trajectory of the historiography of slavery as it has at times intersected with human-animal studies. First, the essay traces the historiography of slavery from 1918 to the 1980s to question how historians wrote about both chattel slavery as a regime of labor involving animals and the dehumanizing function of slavery as an economic system. Second, the essay looks at how the “animal turn,” beginning in the 1980s, has since influenced how social, intellectual, and environmental historians have written about slavery and human-animal relationships. Finally, the essay concludes by making the case that animal historians interested in slavery should pay attention to ongoing debates and discussions in Black studies involving the philosophy of humanity. **KEYWORDS** human-animal studies, Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, racial capitalism, philosophy of humanity

INTRODUCTION

Karl Heinzen wrote in 1871 that the Three-Fifths Compromise of the US Constitution is a critical key for understanding American society. “This might,” he held, “be called a compromise between man and beast.”¹ Heinzen contributed to the intellectual milieu of a group of fellow socialist thinkers, the German Forty-Eighters, who participated in the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe.² Heinzen defined enslaved people in the antebellum South as “a beast-man” interpellated by the law as “three parts man and two parts beast.” Heinzen’s thesis stressed the legal, economic, and social hybridity of enslaved persons: they existed in the gray area between humanity and animality and were denied the rights granted to man by God as stated in the Declaration of Independence by the nation of their captors. Chattel slavery, in short, undermined the philosophical foundations of Enlightenment humanism and American claims of exceptional freedom. Heinzen’s claims were not dissimilar to those made by other antebellum writers. Midwestern abolitionists like John Rankin held that slavery “pressed them [the enslaved] from the rank of men to that of beasts, they are bought and sold, and driven from place to place like mere animal herds.”³

1. Karl Heinzen, *What Is Real Democracy? Answered by an Exposition of the Constitution of the United States* (Indianapolis: H. Lieber, 1871), 59.

2. Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

3. John Rankin, *Letters on American Slavery: Addressed to Mr. Thomas Rankin, Merchant at Middlebrook, Augusta County, Va.* (Garrison & Knapp, 1833), 12.

Animal History, volume 1, number 1, pp. 33–51. electronic ISSN: 2998-3673. © 2024 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://online.ucpress.edu/journals/pages/reprintspermissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/ah.2024.102>

More importantly, the statements made by thinkers like Heinzen and activists like Rankin reflected the ideas and experiences of Black writers and formerly enslaved people. John Williams, for instance, recalled in 1855 how he and other slaves on a New Orleans plantation slept “huddled together like so many brute creatures. . . . Altogether our penn was very much like a dog kennel.”⁴ John Brown, a formerly enslaved man from Georgia, likewise argued in print that slaveholders “look upon us only as working cattle, but seem to act on the principle that there are no bounds to human endurance.”⁵ “A slave is not a human being in the eye of the law,” wrote Brown, “and the slaveholder looks upon him just as what the law makes him.”⁶ William J. Anderson further testified that slaveholders treated slaves like dogs. Anderson remembered one enslaver who forced a man to strip naked in a barn and “train him with a whip as if he were a dog.”⁷

More than a century after the appearance of Heinzen’s book *What Is Real Democracy?*, Cedric J. Robinson continued the study of enslaved people as a social class. On the question of the slaveholder’s recognition of the slave’s humanity, Robinson wrote that the key question was “just what sort of people they were . . . and could be. Slavery altered the conditions of their being, but it could not negate their being.”⁸ Robinson emphasized the racial and racializing nature of capitalism and held that capitalism constructed racial categories—including Black and White—to justify primitive accumulation in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Like C. L. R. James, Robinson expanded on the discussion of slavery presented by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, published in three volumes between 1867 and 1894. Marx analogized the first passage as the “commercial hunting of black-skins,” and lamented the reckless sacrifice of enslaved life as “human chattel” property on Caribbean plantations.⁹ For Robinson, the legal and intellectual justifications for the enslavement of people of West and West Central African descent in Europe changed from the medieval era to the early modern period, as depictions of Africans transformed from their alleged associations with the diabolical to representations of Africans as “dumb, animal labor.”¹⁰ Through enslavement, the formerly unique legal person became a fungible commodity, the chattel slave.

4. John Williams, *The Narrative of J. W. . . . Shewing how He Made His Escape from New Orleans, in America, and Came to England* (Chatham: Printed and published for the author by R. Taylor, 1855), 8.

5. John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England* (London: 1855), 191.

6. Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 202.

7. William J. Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson Twenty-Four Years a Slave: Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!!* (Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 46.

8. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Windsor, ON: Zed Press, 1983), 125.

9. Karl Marx, *Capital: The Process of Capitalist Production*, Vol. I (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1915), 293, 823. The etymological history of chattel and cattle is revelatory, as the word *cattle* in Middle English referred to both the animal, *bos taurus*, and the medieval Latin term for property, *capitale*. The word *cattle* derives from the Norman French term *catel*, meaning property, and by the 1500s the term *cattle* mostly referred to animals, whereas the term *chattel*, from the Central French term *chattel*, designated private property; see Tibor Őrsi, “Cow versus Beef: Terms Denoting Animals and Their Meat in English,” *Eger Journal of English Studies* 15 (2015): 49–58, 56.

10. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 4.

The purpose of this essay is to survey the historiography of slavery as it has at times intersected with animal history. Beginning with the Dunning School of the early 20th century until the 2020s provides a chronological focus to evaluate how these two fields have at times overlapped and to chart the emergence of what might be called human-animal studies of slavery. My principal focus will be the historiography of slavery in North America and the Anglophone Atlantic world, and this will be neither an exhaustive account of the field nor of critical animal studies writ large, but rather an assessment of how historians have written about slavery and human-animal relationships. In the essay's conclusion, I outline some of the possible directions that historians continuing to work in this field must grapple with, in particular several philosophical positions and questions deriving from Black studies.

HISTORIES OF SLAVERY BEFORE THE ANIMAL TURN

At the start of the 20th century, the Dunning School—led by William Archibald Dunning of Columbia University—developed a comprehensive account of slavery intent on supporting the legal and social regime of Jim Crow.¹¹ While many of Dunning's students focused their efforts on the era of Reconstruction, Ulrich B. Phillips turned his attention on slavery before the Civil War and included a limited treatment of human-animal interactions. Defending the position that slavery was a civilizing “school” and benign institution, Phillips devoted attention to what he perceived as the labor-saving use of livestock animals, such as the use of ox- and cattle-powered sugar mills of the English Caribbean islands, horse-drawn shovel plows on Georgia cotton plantations, and mules and oxen for plowing in the South Carolina Lowcountry and the Virginia Piedmont.¹² Phillips mentioned plantation pests, in particular rats and insects, without any real analysis of enslaved people's labors for eradicating these animals.¹³ It must be emphasized that Phillips understood slavery to be an enlightening business whereby those enslaved enjoyed an “essentially mild” treatment from paternalistic slaveholders.¹⁴ For Phillips, the slave's encounter with livestock animals fit within a “civilizing” narrative of slavery.

Rather than see slavery as a fundamentally benevolent mode of production, Stanley Elkins held that slavery enacted “psychic displacement,” shock, and depersonalization on the minds of enslaved captives and unfree workers in the Americas.¹⁵ Drawing on scholarship of the Holocaust and psychoanalysis, Elkins claimed that the first passage especially—that is, the forced march of captured persons from their homelands to coastal outposts and barracoons, castle dungeons, or ships at anchor—degraded their minds to the

11. Eric Foner, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

12. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Régime* (D. Appleton, 1918), 55, 219, 231, 342.

13. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 59–60, 211.

14. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 342.

15. Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 109, 117.

cognitive state of “beasts.”¹⁶ For Elkins, the psychological trauma of capture, sale, and forced labor overwhelmed the enslaved and transformed them into dependent, childlike, and animal-like subjects.

Into the 1960s, historians of slavery debated the degree of animalization those enslaved suffered under the rule of the plantocracy. Eugene D. Genovese, Sterling Stuckey, George M. Fredrickson, and Christopher Lasch all argued that the enslaved consciously resisted their dehumanization. Genovese specifically attacked the all-encompassing structure of Elkins’s “Sambo” thesis presented in *Slavery* (1959).¹⁷ The “Sambo” thesis held that slavery psychologically brutalized enslaved people to such an extent that they became psychologically diminished to a childlike, dependent, submissive mental state. Stuckey likewise undermined Elkins by showing how the enslaved use animal folklore, such as tales of Brer Rabbit, to covertly challenge their enslavers’ ideas.¹⁸ Brer Rabbit and other trickster figures that derived from West African literary traditions further provided a shared repository of narrative through which a Diasporic African identity could be forged from storytelling.¹⁹ Fredrickson and Lasch added that enslaved people sabotaged and interfered with production on plantations by abusing animals.²⁰

Other historians who did not directly take aim at either the paternalist narrative developed by Phillips, or the Sambo thesis advanced by Elkins, contributed to this trajectory by homing in on the human-animal labor regimes that were integral to slavery. Gary Dunbar illuminated the lives of South Carolina “cattle hunters,” enslaved men tasked with retrieving stray cattle and known for their skilled horsemanship.²¹ Building on Eric Williams’s monumental *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Richard B. Sheridan stressed that slaves, horses, mules, and horned cattle on Caribbean sugar plantations contributed dearly to the growth of England’s Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries.²² However, historians paid little attention to comparing these kinds of labor relations in other contexts, such as New Spain, despite enslaved people’s work with mule trains and packhorses in colonial Mexico.²³

David Brion Davis’s *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966) constituted a monumental contribution to the analysis of slavery and animality in European thought. For Davis, a scholar trained in intellectual history, the problem of slavery lay “not in its cruelty or economic exploitation, but in the underlying conception of man as a conveyable

16. Elkins, *Slavery*, 99.

17. Eugene D. Genovese, “Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis,” *Civil War History* 13, no. 4 (1967): 293–314.

18. Sterling Stuckey, “Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery,” *The Massachusetts Review* 9, no. 3 (1968): 417–437.

19. Babacar M’baye, *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

20. George M. Fredrickson and Christopher Lasch, “Resistance to Slavery,” *Civil War History* 13, no. 4 (1967): 315–329.

21. Gary S. Dunbar, “Colonial Carolina Cowpens,” *Agricultural History* 35, no. 3 (1961): 125–131.

22. Richard B. Sheridan, “The Plantation Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, 1625–1775,” *Caribbean Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 5–25.

23. Peter Boyd-Bowman, “Negro Slaves in Early Colonial Mexico,” *The Americas* 26, no. 2 (1969): 134–151.

possession with no more autonomy of will and consciousness than a domestic animal.”²⁴ Davis foregrounded Aristotle’s defense of natural slavery in *Politics* as a key text in the identification of enslaved people with laboring animals.²⁵ In medieval Europe, Thomas Aquinas elaborated ideas about natural slavery and animality, theorizing slaves as “the physical instrument of his owner, who had full claim to everything the slave possessed or produced,” including their children.²⁶ Davis’s work also foregrounded the racist ideology developed by Enlightenment thinkers like Edward Long and Thomas Jefferson that tightened the link between slaves and animals in the minds of European slaveholders, namely, that African women had sex with animals.²⁷ Claire Jean Kim places these unquestionably racist ideas about human-animal sexuality within the Enlightenment concept of the Great Chain of Being, arguing that thinkers like Jefferson saw people of African descent as “a midpoint between Europeans and apes.”²⁸

Building on the work of Genovese, social historians in the 1970s continued to emphasize that enslaved people rejected their dehumanization as animal-like subjects. Using materials collected by the Slave Narrative Collection assembled by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, Paul D. Escott showed how slaves themselves “drew the analogy between good treatment of valuable livestock and proper care of human work animals” in interviews with FWP workers.²⁹ Expanding on the work of Davis, John Passmore published an intellectual history of the treatment of animals in European culture in 1975.³⁰ Passmore looked at slavery and the legal, social, and economic status of animals over the *longue durée*, noting that Aristotle defined natural slaves as animal-like in *Politics*.³¹ In the 6th century CE, the Code of Justinian characterized enslaved people as legally akin to livestock.³²

Historians of slavery in Latin America looked to the Society of Jesus as a source for competing ideas about the humanity of slavery or the dehumanizing nature of enslavement. David G. Sweet turned to the work of Jorge Benci, an Italian Jesuit missionary to Brazil in the late 17th century, whose *Economia cristã dos senhores no governo dos escravos* (Christian economic principles in slave management) expressly aimed at teaching slaveholders to distinguish between the treatment of slaves and animals.³³

24. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 62.

25. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 70.

26. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 104. On Enlightenment claims of African women having sex with animals, see Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36–37.

27. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 462–463.

28. Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 37.

29. Paul D. Escott, “The Context of Freedom: Georgia’s Slaves during the Civil War,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (1974): 79–104.

30. John Passmore, “The Treatment of Animals,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36, no. 2 (1975): 195–218.

31. Passmore, “The Treatment of Animals,” 210.

32. Passmore, “The Treatment of Animals,” 206.

33. David G. Sweet, “Black Robes and ‘Black Destiny’: Jesuit Views of African Slavery in 17th-Century Latin America,” *Revista de Historia de América*, no. 86 (1978): 87–133.

Historians of the 1980s like F. Nwabueze Okoye continued to build on the scholarship of the intellectual history of slavery. In his study of Patriot intellectuals such as John Dickinson and Samuel Sherwood, Okoye revealed that the American separatists truly believed that Parliament treated its colonial subjects as “inferior animals” or even “an inferior species of animals, made to be beasts of burden.”³⁴ Overturning Bernard Bailyn’s claims that chattel slavery played little part in the motivating causes of the American Revolution, Okoye showed that Patriot writers felt intense fears of being transformed into objects akin to those governed by the legal regime of chattel slavery: “The American patriots, when they used the rhetoric of ‘slavery,’ were expressing their fear that England actually intended to subjugate and reduce them to the status of chattel slaves, to bind them in the very same shackles with which they bound their own black slaves.”³⁵

Historians writing from approximately 1918 until 1980 did, if only in passing or through the lens of intellectual history, examine human-animal relations under slavery. However, as the next section documents, this emerging field changed in the 1980s as historians began to incorporate the theories, arguments, and methods of the “animal turn” coming from cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology.

COMBINING SLAVERY AND ANIMAL STUDIES

Marjorie Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison* first appeared in 1988, the same decade as the beginning of the so-called “animal turn” heralding the rise of critical animal studies.³⁶ In a preface to the first edition, Alice Walker discussed the violence inflicted upon animals in American society, specifically the “enslavement of animals” for cosmetics and pharmaceutical research, zoological captivity, and meat production. Spiegel’s book set out to compare the histories of speciesism and anti-Black racism and linked the settler conquest of Nature and the “wilderness” to the same possessive entitlement felt over animals and enslaved chattel property.³⁷ In using the term *speciesism*, Spiegel aligned her work with the utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer. In his 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, Singer defined speciesism as a prejudice or bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species.³⁸ Spiegel held that the exploitation and commodification of labor by slaveholding planters and yeoman farmers contributed to their equivalent objectification in American society. Branding, scarification, and mutilation, such as ear cropping, also figured into her account of how both animals and enslaved humans were often marked by agriculturalists as a form of ownership and control. Finally,

34. F. Nwabueze Okoye, “Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1980): 4–28, 9, 27.

35. Okoye, “Chattel Slavery,” 16.

36. Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Heretic Books, 1988); Kenneth Shapiro, “Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future,” *Society & Animals* 28, no. 7 (2020): 797–833.

37. Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*, 14–15.

38. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975).

the separation and control of families was a key driver to the dehumanization of slaves and subjugation of animals.

For Spiegel, the auction house served as a critical site for commodification and disciplinary power. Threats of sale and separation, in Spiegel's account, preyed upon the real emotions of family bonds and kinship shared by animals and people. Spiegel's text is filled with visual evidence of human and animal slavery, including images of slaves and animals being whipped, collared, transported in crowded shipments, and even instances of castration. Turning to medicine, Spiegel further analyzed the medical and scientific exploitation of animals and African Americans, including analysis of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which left African American men in rural Alabama untreated for syphilis without their informed consent by the US Public Health Service from 1932 to 1972. The study's goals were to observe the natural progression of the disease; however, the participants were not informed about their diagnosis and were denied treatment after penicillin became available as a cure.³⁹ Animal vivisection studies likewise exposed nonhuman creatures to experimental surgeries, drug testing, and studies to monitor disease progression.

While not directly citing Spiegel's work, the Trinidadian historian C. L. R. James engaged in the comparison of enslaved people and animals in a 1989 essay titled "The Slaves." Generalizing on the nature of slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean, James wrote that the "difficulty was that though one could trap them like animals, transport them in pens, work them alongside an ass or a horse and beat both with the same stick, stable them, and starve them they remained, despite their black skins and curly hair, quite invincibly human beings; with the intelligence and resentments of human beings."⁴⁰ James certainly identified dehumanization as a key feature of chattel slavery in the early modern Americas, without directly engaging with Spiegel's ideas.

Since the publication of Spiegel's work, a number of important criticisms of the book have been made by scholars, including Bénédicte Boisseron's *Afro-Dog*. Boisseron's book covers a period much wider than the era of slavery—indeed, the book concludes with a discussion of the present. Yet, Boisseron makes an important argument about Spiegel and others who would claim to make an analogy between animal suffering and slavery: "The main argument here is that, though one should not ignore entangled forms of oppression, analogizing can be harmful when it is meant to serve one cause over the other; when its sole function is, for example, to serve the animal cause by instrumentalizing the black cause."⁴¹ Rather than compare Black suffering and animal suffering, Boisseron argues historians should contextualize human-animal relations in all their diversity, and challenge commonplace beliefs that people of African descent and animals are "connected through their comparable state of subjection and humiliation, and instead focus on

39. Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

40. C. L. R. James, "The Slaves," *Caribbean Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1989): 1–10, 4.

41. Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), xiii.

interspecies alliance.⁴² Boisseron substantially challenges the value of the dreaded comparison, and future historians should bear her insights in mind.

In 1994, Karl Jacoby produced a pathbreaking essay, “Slaves by Nature?,” linking the histories of slavery, domestication, and the environment. Jacoby noted that English and Spanish slavers treated African and Indigenous slaves as if they were animals. Furthermore, he dates the animalization of slaves to antiquity, noting that “Herodotus, when mentioning slaves in *The Histories*, makes frequent use of the Greek term ‘andraphon,’ which as F.D. Harvey has observed, means man-footed creature, ‘an unpleasant word formed on the analogy of “four-footed creatures,” i.e., cattle.”⁴³ In a text from second millennium BCE Mesopotamia, he notes a passage on slave punishment stating “I have beaten your body red with a whip like a runaway ass.”⁴⁴ Jacoby’s essay outlined a research trajectory for understanding slavery in world history as a component of the transformation of people and the natural world into domesticated subjects, slaves, and livestock.

Philip Morgan’s 1995 case study of Vineyard Pen, a livestock-raising farm in Westmoreland Parish, Jamaica (1750–51), illuminates the daily labor of enslaved people with animals on the island.⁴⁵ Utilizing the diary of Thomas Thistlewood, Morgan brings into relief the lives of men like Julius, Simon, Guy, Charles, and Scipio, who were tasked with managing more than 200 cattle and several dozen sheep on the pen.⁴⁶ Beyond managing their pasturing, these men worked at castrating young bulls, branding and earmarking cattle, performing veterinary work (including bleeding cattle in the fattening pasture twice a year and assisting with births), and retrieving cattle and horses out of swamps and rock holes.⁴⁷ Elderly and young adult slaves labored as shepherds, including one shepherdess, and goatherds.⁴⁸ Punishments for neglecting these animals were severe, and Morgan notes how Thistlewood dealt 50 lashes to Mimer when a ewe escaped her charge. Dick, the driver of the pen, enjoyed the special privilege of keeping dogs, whom he hunted wild boar with to make gifts to their enslaver.⁴⁹ Phibbah, an enslaved woman and the target of rape by Thistlewood, also held her own animal property, including hogs and a mare.⁵⁰

Jacoby’s and Morgan’s essays modeled two different approaches to slavery and human-animal studies. On the one hand, Jacoby’s “Slaves by Nature?” presented a macro-historical account of slavery and animal domestication as mechanisms of power wielded by the landowning classes against people and animals over the *longue durée*. On the other hand, Morgan’s analysis of Vineyard Pen demonstrated the virtues of

42. Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, xx.

43. Karl Jacoby, “Slaves by Nature? Domestic Animals and Human Slaves,” *Slavery and Abolition* 15, no. 1 (1994): 89–99, 90.

44. Jacoby, “Slaves by Nature?,” 90.

45. Philip D. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: Vineyard Pen, 1750–1751,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1995): 47–76.

46. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” 53.

47. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” 55.

48. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” 56.

49. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” 58.

50. Morgan, “Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” 68.

a close, microhistorical account of a specific place and time to understand slavery as a more-than-human assemblage of people and animals. Since the publication of these two essays, historians have continued to struggle with balancing the wide chronological and theoretically informed scope advocated for by Jacoby, and the narrower, more empirical approach defended by Morgan.

Mark Smith's *How Race Is Made* (2006) combined insights from sensory history to the human-animal relations produced by slavery to develop a new phenomenological account of enslavement that balanced the micro and macro levels of history.⁵¹ Smith turned his analysis to descriptions of African American sensoria in the antebellum South, noting that English surgeons like Charles White believed that Black people could hear horses and flocks of sheep at greater distances than Whites.⁵² Smith also turned to the soundscape of slavery to understand how slaveholders used sonics for slaves and animals. "Planters," he writes, "summoned slaves as they summoned animals. Some thought dogs and blacks understood whistles" due to their sensitive hearing.⁵³ Abolitionists likewise sensed African American animality through scent, such as James Gilmore's description of Black houses as resembling a "swine-sty or dog kennel."⁵⁴ Fugitivity and recapture hinged on smell, and Smith identifies the hound dogs "that tracked slave runaways were extensions of the master's nose, enabling him to continue surveillance out of his sight."⁵⁵ Bloodhounds in particular became the weapon of choice for slaveholders in Cuba and the Gulf South to recapture fugitives.⁵⁶

Into the 2000s and 2010s, several cultural and social historians wrote excellent human-animal histories of slavery ranging from case studies to monographs. Pet-keeping, for example, further blurred the boundary between humans and animals under slavery. Sarah Hand Meacham likens the pet-keeping habits of Chesapeake slavers to courtly practices of favorite keeping among European aristocrats.⁵⁷ Keeping favorite humans and favored animals, Meacham contends, "naturalized slavery, granting planters, and to a lesser extent their wives, validation of the superiority they presumed."⁵⁸ Silver collars materialized the equation of enslaved people and animals, and afforded slaveholders the opportunity to display their "mastery and refinement" simultaneously.⁵⁹

Enslaved people's relations with equines received renewed attention in the 2010s from several scholars. Katherine C. Mooney's *Race Horse Men* brings into relief the skill and exploitation of enslaved horse trainers and jockeys in thoroughbred horse racing in the

51. Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

52. Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 13.

53. Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 22–23.

54. Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 26.

55. Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 35.

56. John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796–1865," *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 2 (2006): 259–302.

57. Sarah Hand Meacham, "Pets, Status, and Slavery in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake," *Journal of Southern History* 77, no. 3 (2011): 521–554.

58. Meacham, "Pets, Status, and Slavery," 529.

59. Meacham, "Pets, Status, and Slavery," 533.

antebellum South.⁶⁰ At racetracks throughout the South, slaveholders sought to enact their own aristocratic pretensions through performing expertise over mastering enslaved people and horses. Furthermore, discussions between turf men around breeding, training, and racing naturalized social hierarchies placing White free men over their equine and Black subjects.

Looking at an earlier period and in the Caribbean plantation zone, David Lambert's research examines the hybrid co-mobility of what he terms "master-horse-slave."⁶¹ Using print images, Lambert identifies master-horse-slave as the real and depicted arrangement of "enslaved footmen accompanying whites on horseback, often seeking to keep up by holding onto the horses' tails."⁶² Drawing on Saidiya Hartman's theory of scenes of subjection—referring to the quotidian moments of terror produced by slavery that necessitated enslaved people become and perform the "enjoyment" of being enslaved—Lambert centers master-horse-slave as a mundane form of domination through which slaveholders reinforced relations of racialized power.⁶³ Master-horse-slave staged a spatial arrangement of Caribbean plantation slavery that can be read horizontally and vertically: White riders atop horses moved above and in front of Black runners on the ground.

Another important essay from Lambert is their analysis of runaway slave advertisements and advertisements for stolen or strayed animals, especially horses.⁶⁴ Branding scars with the initials of a slaveholder marked people and animals as chattel property in the British Caribbean. Lambert frames these connections as parts of the captive human–animal nexus of slavery.⁶⁵ Building on the work of Orlando Patterson and Karl Jacoby, Lambert considers these shared experiences of humans and animals within the wider history of domestication: "That both enslaved humans and domesticated nonhuman animals are subject to 'violent domination' is obvious: these are precisely the techniques of control and coercion described by Jacoby and Steven Best, and evident in the notices of runaways and strays."⁶⁶

Lambert draws on Orlando Patterson's theory of social death as discussed in his *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) to argue that forced separation and the dissolution of kinship connections and communal relations constituted a form of natal alienation shared by people and animals.⁶⁷ While many scholars would agree that slavery

60. Katherine C. Mooney, *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

61. David Lambert, "Master–Horse–Slave: Mobility, Race and Power in the British West Indies, c. 1780–1838," *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 4 (2015): 618–641.

62. Lambert, "Master–Horse–Slave," 619.

63. Lambert, "Master–Horse–Slave," 634; see also Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22–25. On enjoyment and slavery, Hartman writes: "The constitution of blackness as an abject and degraded condition and the fascination with the other's enjoyment went hand in hand" (22–23).

64. David Lambert, "Runaways and Strays: Rethinking (Non)human Agency in Caribbean Slave Societies," in *Historical Animal Geographies*, ed. Sharon Wilcox and Stephanie Rutherford (Routledge, 2018), 185–198.

65. Lambert, "Runaways and Strays," 187.

66. Lambert, "Runaways and Strays," 188; see also Steven Best, *The Politics of Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

67. Lambert, "Runaways and Strays," 188. On Patterson, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

involved two of the key components of social death—violent domination and natal alienation—Lambert makes the case that the third aspect, dishonor, can also be seen among the treatment of both enslaved people and animals by slaveholders. Enslavers denied people and animals their autonomy and mobility, and in doing so established “the practice of human dominion over animals [that] became the basis for intra-human oppression” through racial hierarchies.⁶⁸

Lambert’s essay also makes a crucial intervention into the theory of agency that social historians of slavery and the environment rely upon. Several options are available to historians for defining agency. One, borrowing from actor-network theory, would see agency through animals’ roles as history-shaping agents.⁶⁹ A second possibility is to conceive of agency as the result of conscious action, something highly debated among historians and ethologists alike. A third variant of agency sees animals as sources of resistance to human ambitions, much like early modern notions of pests as rivals to human goals. On the possibility of slave resistance and attacks against animals, Lambert suggests that “animals might be injured in acts of violence by enslaved people, perhaps borne of frustration or as part of more calculated forms of ‘industrial sabotage.’”⁷⁰

Charlotte Carrington-Farmer’s history of the Narragansett Pacer, a breed of racing and riding horses, underscores the exchanges of horses between New England and the Caribbean. Rhode Island planters developed an equine industry by exploiting the labor and knowledge of enslaved people to breed, raise, and train horses.⁷¹ Slaveholders sold the Narragansett Pacer to Caribbean sugar estates as a workhorse capable of laboring in mill-works and other draft work. Carrington-Farmer also shows how enslaved people used these animals for their own purposes, such as one man who fled from his slaveholder on “a fine large Bay Horse, Fourteen Hands high . . . a natural Pacer.”⁷² In a related essay, Carrington-Farmer demonstrates that New England farmers also experimented with exporting mules to Caribbean plantations as draft animals.⁷³ In her analysis of the language New England slaveholders used to describe mules and enslaved people, Carrington-Farmer shows rhetorical comparisons between breeding and selling “African jacks [male donkeys]” and enslaved captives. Carrington-Farmer’s analysis here is quite similar to Mackenzie Cooley’s book *The Perfection of Nature*, in which Cooley argues that Renaissance-era values and techniques for animal breeding influenced emerging racial paradigms and justifications for slavery in the Americas.⁷⁴

68. Lambert, “Runaways and Strays,” 188.

69. Lambert, “Runaways and Strays,” 192.

70. Lambert, “Runaways and Strays,” 194.

71. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, “Trading Horses in the Eighteenth Century: Rhode Island and the Atlantic World,” in *Equestrian Cultures: Horses, Human Society, and the Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Kristen Guest and Monica Mattfeld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 92–109.

72. Carrington-Farmer, “Trading Horses in the Eighteenth Century,” 106.

73. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, “Shipping Mules in the Eighteenth Century: New England’s Equine Exports to the West Indies,” in *Agents of European Overseas Empires*, ed. Agnès Delahaye, Elodie Peyrol-Kleiber, L. H. Roper, and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2024), 200–222.

74. Mackenzie Cooley, *The Perfection of Nature: Animals, Breeding, and Race in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

African cattle herding techniques shaped the expansion of estancias in the Pampas and on Caribbean islands like Barbuda between the 16th and 19th centuries.⁷⁵ Andrew Sluyter shows in *Black Ranching Frontiers* how African knowledge of pasture management and breeding techniques shaped the grasslands surrounding urban centers like Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and how Black cattlemen adopted Kalinago ideas about land use on Barbuda. Transhumance patterns—cycles of seasonal movement from summer to winter pasturages—connected labor among Black ranch workers in the Southern Cone.⁷⁶ Sluyter also shows how a common soundscape of herding calls and whistles reflected a sonic layer of animal skill among cattle herders.

Canine histories of slavery likewise flourished in the 2010s. Larry H. Spruill's essay on the use of bloodhounds in slave patrols articulates how predatory policing tactics from the antebellum era continue to shape racialized law enforcement systems in the present.⁷⁷ "The need for repressive supervision of blacks," argues Spruill, "led to the formation of local police to insure white domination and black subordination. This responsibility was given to a trinity of southern law enforcers: slave patrols, slave hunters and their non-human partners," bloodhounds.⁷⁸ Spruill further connects antebellum South patrolling techniques to the Caribbean, writing that patrollers on horseback accompanied by bloodhounds originated in Cuba and Jamaica before being transplanted to sites like South Carolina. As Sara E. Johnson has shown, slaveholders in the Caribbean used dogs to suppress fugitive Diasporic African settlements and multiethnic communities during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the Second Maroon War in Jamaica (1795–96), and the Second Seminole War in territorial Florida (1835–42).⁷⁹ Beyond hunting fugitives, Johnson introduces evidence from colonial Saint-Domingue to discuss how "dogs were employed to publicly consume [slaves] in a staged performance of white supremacy and domination," which showcased their dogs' ferocity and ability to consume Black flesh.⁸⁰

Brigitte Fielder and Thomas Andrews contrast the use of dogs for slave hunting with case studies of enslaved people's friendship with canines.⁸¹ Fielder uses Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to explore the articulation of dehumanization under slavery, bloodhounds as instruments for recapturing slaves, and friendship between

75. Andrew Sluyter, *Black Ranching Frontiers: African Cattle Herders of the Atlantic World, 1500–1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

76. Andrew Sluyter, "How Africans and Their Descendants Participated in Establishing Open-Range Cattle Ranching in the Americas," *Environment and History* 21, no. 1 (2015): 77–101.

77. Larry H. Spruill, "Slave Patrols, 'Packs of Negro Dogs' and Policing Black Communities," *Phylon* (1960–) 53, no. 1 (2016): 42–66.

78. Spruill, "Slave Patrols," 43.

79. Sara E. Johnson, "'You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat': Waging Inter-American Wars of Torture and Terror," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 65–92.

80. Johnson, "'You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat,'" 68.

81. Thomas G. Andrews, "Beasts of the Southern Wild: Slaveholders, Slaves, and Other Animals in Charles Ball's Slavery in the United States," in *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics*, ed. Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S. K. Young (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 21–47; Brigitte Fielder, "Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends: African Americans and Dogs in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionist Literature," in *American Beasts Perspectives on Animals, Animality and US Culture, 1776–1920*, ed. Dominik Ohrem (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2017), 153–174.

enslaved people and dogs. Reading the character George Harris's affinity for his pet dog Carlo, who he considers to be a member of his family, Fielder argues that enslaved people's empathy for animals derives in part from their shared status as living property that is subject to violence.⁸²

Revisiting the archive of the Federal Writers' Project of the WPA, Rachael L. Pasierowska's essay on birds and African American ideas about animals points to the longevity of cosmologies and beliefs from the era of slavery until post-Reconstruction Jim Crow. Formerly enslaved people and the children of those formerly enslaved believed, for instance, that the calls of screech owls represented an omen of misfortune, even death.⁸³ Pasierowska uses the interviews of women like Mary Williams, who reported to a Slave Narrative Collection worker that it "is a sign of death for a hoot owl to come holler in your yard."⁸⁴ Citing another interview with Lucinda Davis, Pasierowska suggests that African American beliefs about screech owl sounds influenced Creek beliefs about the animal's noise, and Davis recalled that "lots of Creek people say dey hear de screech owl close to de house, and sho' nuff somebody in de family die soon."⁸⁵ This point is especially worthwhile for studying African American intellectual history. Folklore presents a rich archive for examining Diasporic African–Native American intellectual exchanges. Looking particularly at trickster narratives—such as Brer Rabbit—may, as Jay Hansford C. Vest contends, reflect long-standing interactions between Diasporic African and Native American communities.⁸⁶

Pasierowska further examines beliefs about vultures in these interviews. Several interviewees reported transforming into buzzards or vultures to escape the brutality of punishment under slavery. Pasierowska cites the interview of one Wallace Quarterman, a resident of Darien, Georgia, who "recounted a story of several Africans who, outraged at a whipping from an overseer, 'riz up in duh sky an tun hesef intuh buzzuds an fly right back tuh Africa."⁸⁷ Pasierowska hypothesizes that "flight gave the slaves the means with which to escape from the grasp of an overseer and his ensuing punishments. Flying back to Africa ensured eternal respite from the overseer's punishments. Another interpretation is that by becoming a bird, they might better effectuate a transition to the world of the afterlife by means of flight."⁸⁸ Stories of flying or becoming birds, as Angela Zimmerman argues, were prevalent among Gullah and Geechee people who flew across the Atlantic to Africa.⁸⁹ Zimmerman's emphasis on the value of appreciating flying stories in the Black Atlantic, she argues, affords new pathways for decolonial theory to resist Eurocentric

82. Fielder, "Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends," 167.

83. Rachael L. Pasierowska, "'Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death': Birds and the Souls of Black Folk in the 1930s American South," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 1 (2017): 27–46.

84. Pasierowska, "'Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death,'" 30.

85. Pasierowska, "'Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death,'" 30.

86. Jay Hansford C. Vest, "From Bobtail to Brer Rabbit: Native American Influences on Uncle Remus," *American Indian Quarterly* (2000): 19–43.

87. Pasierowska, "'Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death,'" 35.

88. Pasierowska, "'Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death,'" 35.

89. Angela Zimmerman, "Guinea Sam Nightingale and Magic Marx in Civil War Missouri: Provincializing Global History and Decolonizing Theory," *History of the Present* 8, no. 2 (2018): 140–176.

historical modes of analysis. Likewise, Pasierowska locates stories like Quarterman's in Yoruba philosophy: "Among the Yoruba, vultures represented birds that possessed the ability to traverse the tangible world of the living and its intangible counterpart of deities and the dead. The Yoruba understood such creatures as a type of messenger of the gods, which particularly comes to light in the practice of animal and human sacrifices."⁹⁰

Moving into the 2020s, scholars trained in both literary criticism and history have continued to approach the question of the dehumanizing or animalizing nature of slavery. Joshua Bennett's 2020 book *Being Property Once Myself* provides an important theoretical account of Blackness, humanity, and animality. Through an examination of personal narratives and African American literature, Bennett explores how Black intellectuals envisioned "the Animal as a source of unfettered possibility" for wildness, escape, and kinship beyond the logic of private property that produced the modern Man, as theorized by Sylvia Wynter.⁹¹ In a landmark essay, Wynter argued that Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment philosophy "mapped onto a projected Chain of Being of organic forms of life, organized about a line drawn between, on the one hand, divinely created-to-be-rational humans, and on the other, no less divinely created-to-be-irrational animals," and that European natural philosophers, merchants, and jurists placed enslaved people between these two categories.⁹² Bennett situates the ideas of Frederick Douglass and others as representative "experiences of living as sociolegal nonpersons: a subgenre of the human, always already positioned in fraught proximity to animal life."⁹³ Importantly, Bennett's work demonstrates that the theory of personhood, ethics, and philosophy of mind developed by the authors they discuss is not the rights-bearing person/human articulated by Western philosophers like G. W. F. Hegel, but rather "alternative ways of being human and thinking human personhood."⁹⁴

David Silkenat's study of the ecological damage caused by slavery's expansion in the American Southeast includes an excellent chapter focused on human-animal interactions that combines intellectual and environmental history methods.⁹⁵ Fugitive slaves like John Parker characterized the "real injury" of slavery to being reduced to "an animal without hope."⁹⁶ Silkenat conceptualizes the intersection of chattel slavery, wild animals, and animal domestication in the American Southeast through a "complex zoological framework for slavery" that reveals the anthrozoological dimension of the peculiar institution.⁹⁷

90. Pasierowska, "Screech Owls Allus Holler'round the House before Death," 35.

91. Joshua Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 3–4.

92. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337, 314.

93. Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself*, 4–5.

94. Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself*, 13. See also Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's intervention into Black critical theory and animal studies presented in *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

95. David Silkenat, *Scars on the Land: An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 32–55.

96. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 32.

97. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 32.

In contrast to animal enclosure in New England, antebellum planters in the South perpetuated open-range husbandry. Roaming pigs and feral hogs outcompeted native species like white-tailed deer, and their rooting worsened river and streambank erosion.⁹⁸ Maroon communities like those formed in the Great Dismal Swamp used these animals as food reserves in addition to raising small numbers of fowl.

Expanding on Thomas Andrews's study of the caloric gap provoked by slaveholders, Silkenat shows how enslaved people fished and hunted to counteract the dietetic regime of slavery.⁹⁹ Enslaved people further appropriated the animals of their enslavers, especially horses, for their own purposes.

One of Silkenat's most surprising findings is that half of the 200 insurgents involved in the German Coast Uprising of 1811 rode on horseback as they set fire to plantations sited along the Mississippi River.¹⁰⁰ Many of these women and men labored with these animals as draymen, groomers, and carriage drivers, and used their skill with the animals for their own liberation. Silkenat further adds to ongoing discussions of the role of dehumanization under slavery, showing that slaveholders simultaneously conceived of the enslaved as either passive brutes or threatening creatures. One writer for the *Southern Cultivator*, for instance, portrayed the enslaved to be "merely a mule, and possessing only the instincts of brute creation."¹⁰¹ Enslaved people themselves mobilized this rhetoric to critique slavery, comparing their own living conditions to being treated "like cattle," "lak a mule," or "like a dog."¹⁰²

Kathleen Murphy's research on the South Atlantic slave trade sheds light on how surgeons exploited the routes of the trade and the curiosity and skilled labor of enslaved captives to produce faunal specimen collections in the early 18th century. Murphy's *Captivity's Collections* represents the potential for examining the history of science and slavery together, revealing how enslaved people served as collectors and could become collected specimens themselves. John Burnet, a surgeon for the South Sea Company, profited from the labors of enslaved collectors who assisted him in gathering animals like butterflies, cockroaches, three-toed sloths, marine caterpillars, and fish.¹⁰³ Murphy suggests these collectors included Black, Mestizo, and Pardo—people of African and Indigenous American descent—individuals who possessed environmental knowledge of mountainous regions beyond Spanish control in this period. Slave ship surgeons of separate traders also relied on slaving's infrastructure to accumulate insect specimens in West, West Central, and East Africa.¹⁰⁴

My book, *Empire of Brutality: Enslaved People and Animals in the British Atlantic World* (2023), aims to contribute to this field by providing a materialist account of

98. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 36.

99. Andrews, "Beasts of the Southern Wild," 21–47.

100. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 44–45.

101. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 54–55.

102. Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 54–55.

103. Kathleen S. Murphy, *Captivity's Collections: Science, Natural History, and the British Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2023), 82–83.

104. Murphy, *Captivity's Collections*, 145–146.

dehumanization.¹⁰⁵ The book is divided into two sections. The first three chapters focus on human-animal relations involving trade, curiosity, and labor that structured how enslaved people lived alongside animals from the outfords and castle trade of the Royal African Company to the plantations of the Americas from the second half of the 17th century until the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807. The final two chapters focus on enslaved people's resistance by attacking, stealing, and thinking about animals. The book engages in a corpus of manuscript and print sources well-known among historians of slavery: letters, specimen catalogs, natural histories, manuals and instructions, inventories and account books, wills, maps, diaries, and personal narratives. As I clarify in the book's prologue and introduction, *Empire of Brutality* considers ideas about humanity and animality within a European cosmology. The book does not analyze ideas, beliefs, and values about animals or animality produced within uniquely Akan, Igbo, Yoruba, or other ethnolinguistic groups' intellectual milieus. Hopefully, future West and West Central Africanist scholarship will provide insight into these diverse contexts.

However, *Empire of Brutality* makes several theoretical interventions into this field. One is adopting Marcy Norton's framework of human-animal relations to emphasize the power dynamics inherent in one group of people, enslavers, sorting and pairing other people, the enslaved, with forms of animal life.¹⁰⁶ Second, I make the case for employing the moral philosopher David Livingstone Smith's model of dehumanization, which entails that those who seek to disavow or degrade the humanity of others first articulate an essential difference between groups of people, who are further divided into natural kinds; second, these differences are then operationalized by the dehumanizer to create and maintain an ordered social hierarchy wherein superiors rule over inferiors; and third, these essential differences in peoples must be inextricably linked to ancestry.¹⁰⁷

Finally, I put forward that in reading enslaved people's resistance to the dehumanizing power of slavery by attacking, stealing, and killing animals can be interpreted as forms of intellectual critique against slavery itself. In the book's final chapter, for example, I consider a fugitive slave advertisement involving a woman named Kate who escaped from her enslaver on a black horse. In analyzing the advertisement, I argue that Kate made two important assaults on the logic of slavery: first, when she climbed into the saddle she upended the racist belief that people of African descent were "servile" or "cut out" for slavery in plantation settings, an idea articulated by slaveholders including the Reverend Hugh Jones.¹⁰⁸ Second, I claim that Kate's decision reflects a gendered rebuttal to justifications for slavery, since English riders in this period articulated a sense of masculinity bound up with equestrianism and preserving bodily autonomy in the vertical plane. Astride their horses, women like Kate visibly challenged white beliefs about the proper

105. Christopher Michael Blakley, *Empire of Brutality: Enslaved People and Animals in the British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023).

106. Marcy Norton, *The Tame and the Wild: People and Animals After 1492* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024).

107. David Livingstone Smith, *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

108. Blakley, *Empire of Brutality*, 128.

place of Black women in white settler society by using their bodies and by instantiating their own subversive relationships with animals.”¹⁰⁹

One shortcoming of the book that critics have rightly pointed out is my overemphasis on resistance. In reading the diary of Landon Carter, for example, who wrote about his belief that enslaved people consciously injured and killed oxen and cattle, my work perhaps falls into the trap of what Jennifer Morgan terms the “vacuum of perpetual resistance” that overstates or misreads intention in sources produced by slaveholders.¹¹⁰ Another potential example of this overreach is my discussion of fugitive women on horseback mentioned above. I see the tension between empiricism and theory here as a critical fulcrum point for the field moving forward, which I discuss further in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Several directions for future research appear on the horizon of slavery and human-animal studies. To me it seems that much of what future researchers will need to decide is whether to hew close to a strictly empirical approach to the archive, or to embrace theoretical approaches developed by scholars in literary and critical theory, Black studies, and the philosophy of the human.

One trajectory would be to continue following the research agenda of Robinson. Expanding on theoretical frameworks of racial capitalism and political ecology, scholars like Arun Saldanha have critiqued the Plantationocene concept articulated by Donna Haraway.¹¹¹ In her essay, Haraway—elaborating on the work of Jason Moore—situated enslaved people and animals as part of the “cheap nature” Europeans exhausted from enclosed plantations in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. So, as scholars continue to study what Eric Herschthal and John L. Brooke term the “plantation carbon complex,” questions remain to what extent slavery and animal domestication furthered the widening metabolic rift and spatial fix produced by early modern capitalism.¹¹²

109. Blakley, *Empire of Brutality*, 132.

110. Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 167.

111. Arun Saldanha, “A Date with Destiny: Racial Capitalism and the Beginnings of the Anthropocene,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (2020): 12–34; Janae Davis, Alex A. Moulton, Levi Van Sant, and Brian Williams, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, . . . Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 5 (2019): e12438; Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” *Environmental humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–165; Michael Warren Murphy and Caitlin Schroering, “Refiguring the Plantationocene: Racial Capitalism, World-Systems Analysis, and Global Socioecological Transformation,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 26, no. 2 (2020): 400–415; Yolande Jansen, “Exhaustion in the Plantationocene,” *Netherlands Journal of Legal Philosophy* 52, no. 2 (2023): 183.

112. Eric Herschthal, and John L. Brooke, “The Plantation Carbon Complex: Slavery and the Origins of Climate Change in the Early Modern British Atlantic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2024): 255–306. See also Jason W. Moore, “Metabolic Rift or Metabolic Shift? Dialectics, Nature, and the World-Historical Method,” *Theory and Society* 46 (2017): 285–318; Joshua R. Eichen, “Cheapness and (Labor-)Power: The Role of Early Modern Brazilian Sugar Plantations in the Racializing Capitalocene,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1 (2020): 35–52.

Another direction is made clear by critics of the human and humanism, including theorists of Afropessimism and Black Nihilism. In *Afropessimism*, Frank B. Wilderson III argues that without “Black people, Human existence would be unintelligible, in the same way that ‘cat’ has no meaning without ‘dog.’”¹¹³ Working against traditional Marxist conceptions of slavery, Wilderson defends the position that Blackness is antithetical to Human subjectivity. Wilderson’s theory builds on the ideas of Orlando Patterson, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, and is part of a growing arc of scholarship that interrogates the construction of Humanity itself as a product of the Trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trades that connect antiquity to modernity.¹¹⁴ Calvin L. Warren similarly understands Blackness as the negation of Being itself, and argues that humanism is a philosophical tradition predicated on anti-Blackness.¹¹⁵ In Warren’s account, Black people exist “as an intermediary between form and formlessness, animal and man, property and human, and nothing and something.”¹¹⁶ Given the stakes of these philosophical discussions, historians interested in learning from these scholars ought to reconsider at the level of metaphysics and ontology how any narrative involving enslaved people and animals either corroborates or complicates the humanist Man produced from slavery, capitalism, and the Enlightenment.¹¹⁷

Racial capitalism and Afropessimism are not necessarily incommensurable interpretations of slavery. In a series of meditations, rather than strictly expository arguments, Sara-Maria Sorentino brings into relief the necessity of balancing and shifting focus from the historically specific, micro-level cases of enslaved people and slavery, to the general and transhistorical category of Slave discussed by Wilderson.¹¹⁸ Potential future research could reconcile these positions by carefully tacking between specific, discrete case studies and wider analyses of the *longue durée*. This direction seems especially important given the well-funded and politically powerful efforts to reintroduce Eurocentric historiography and epistemology into public school classrooms vis-a-vis Big History.¹¹⁹

Finally, on the point of methodology, I see a real necessity for scholars to engage with Saidiya Hartman’s concept of critical fabulation. In her groundbreaking essay “Venus in Two Acts,” Hartman defined this method as “playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event,

113. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 164.

114. On Wilderson’s influence, see Alexander Ghedi Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013): 669–685.

115. Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism and Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

116. Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 36–37.

117. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 261. See also Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 1–44.

118. Sara-Maria Sorentino, “Slave/Animal/Labor,” *The Comparatist* 46 (2022): 29–51.

119. Jenni Conrad, “The Big History Project and Colonizing Knowledges in World History Curriculum,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 51, no. 1 (2019): 1–20.

to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.”¹²⁰ “The intent of this practice,” Hartman clarifies, “is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance.”¹²¹ In *Empire of Brutality*, I tried to emulate this method in my discussion of Black horse riders like Kate. As I see it, historians are faced with at least two options for interpreting the lives of people like Kate. The first is to abide by what Hartman terms historical realism—that is, to confine oneself to the absolute limits of the archive and empirical evidence. Going in this direction, as I understand it, nullifies the presumed existence of Kate’s mind. The second possibility, following Hartman, would be to “imagine what cannot be verified,” to move away from the foundational epistemology of history as a discipline, and instead to raise questions, possibilities, and speculations about Kate’s own worldview, ideas, ambitions, feelings, and beliefs. Like Fabio Santos, I see this as a decolonial method, one that opens possibilities for writing Black intellectual history through sources that strict empiricism necessarily closes.¹²² ■

Published online: September 9, 2024

120. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, 11.

121. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 12.

122. Fabio Santos, “Mind the Archival Gap,” *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 48, no. 4 (2023): 330–353.