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# The Biopower of Neoliberalism

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## Abstract

In the following paper, I draw on Michel Foucault's genealogies of biopolitics and neoliberalism to explore the links between capitalism and racism in the contemporary United States. The account I develop here illustrates the way in which the biopolitical power to make live and let die is exercised through the employment of liberal and neoliberal economic strategies of government. Specifically, I argue that these strategies of government instrumentalize the population as a mass of potential market-actors and entrepreneurs and, in the process, continually reproduce, manage, and regulate the freedom, security, and endangerment of its members.

The discursive deployment of the figure of the entrepreneur operates here as a marker for the selective identification and sequestration of 'failed entrepreneurs' and 'illegitimate capitalists'<sup>i</sup> as dangers to the market economy and life itself. This selective mechanism, in turn, ensures the biopolitical isolation and purification of 'successful entrepreneurs' and 'legitimate capitalists' as exemplary models of healthy life. This is accomplished, as I will show, primarily through the systematic erasure of historical context from public discourse.

I illustrate this fundamentally anti-historical nature of the figure of the entrepreneur with an analysis of President Obama's 2013 commencement speech at Morehouse College. Specifically, I show that, insofar as populations are compelled to comport themselves as entrepreneurs, they are trained to perceive slavery and its descendant institutions as obstacles to be overcome through individual initiative and moral choice. Because systematic effects of this legacy are ongoing, Black Americans' access to the politico-economic resources necessary for entrepreneurial self-direction is significantly impeded. Those who are unable to acquire these resources are compelled to secure alternative means of self-preservation. Having failed to follow socially sanctioned paths for survival, these subpopulations are depicted as 'failed entrepreneurs,' 'illegitimate capitalists,' social enemies, and examples of unhealthy life. As such, they must be sequestered and instrumentalized as raw materials for the prison-industrial complex. In closing, I suggest that the politico-economic productivity of this biopolitical investment constitutes an important extra-disciplinary function of the prison system.

## War, Biopolitics, and the Economy

At the beginning of his *Society Must Be Defended* lectures, Michel Foucault distinguishes his conception of power from liberal and quasi-Marxist conceptions modeled on formal exchange and economic reproduction. It is not clear, Foucault claims, that power relations are functionally subordinate to, or derivable from, economic relations,<sup>ii</sup> even if they "always constitute a sort of network or loop."<sup>iii</sup> Unfortunately, Foucault does not develop an explicit account of how this network or loop operates. Rather, he turns his attention to the problem of how to understand and analyze power relations in relative isolation from economy. Rejecting liberal and quasi-Marxist conceptions, Foucault proposes that power relations be understood as constituents of a clash of social forces. In order to develop this alternative conception of power relations, he turns to the historical and political discourse of social warfare.<sup>iv</sup>

Foucault traces some transformations of this historico-political discourse of war from the English bourgeois revolution and French aristocrat agitation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to its appropriation by the racial biologists and eugenicists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>v</sup> Initially formulated as a historico-political battle between two social camps, this discourse is re-articulated as a discourse of race war, the war of "the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage."<sup>vi</sup> With this transformation - initiated with the emergence of the biological and medical knowledges - the state becomes "the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race."<sup>vii</sup> The task of the state thus becomes the protection and preservation of society, and the continual activation of an internal war against "threats born of and in its own body,"<sup>viii</sup> a body conducted as "a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on,"<sup>ix</sup> in other words, a population.

The protection and preservation of the body of the state is accomplished by means of biopolitics, the technology of power which targets the biological processes of man-as-species so as to maximize and extract forces for the optimization of a state of life.<sup>x</sup> Because this conglomerate of biological processes is in constant flux - living, breathing, reproducing, dying - it must be targeted by an ensemble of mechanisms of security and regulations informed by forecasts and statistical estimates which "establish a sort of homeostasis, and compensate for variations within this general population and its aleatory field."<sup>xi</sup> This biopolitical homeostasis is, to put it crudely, that of the optimal qualities and

quantities of life and death within the population. The optimization of this homeostasis – the “making-live” of the population – requires the selective elimination, or “letting-die,” of sub-optimal states of life – the task of racism.<sup>xii</sup> Biopolitical racism functions to fragment the field of the biological that power controls and establishes a hierarchy of races.<sup>xiii</sup> This hierarchization and fragmentation ensures the efficient selective elimination of sub-optimal states of life and the enhancement of the overall health and purity of the population.

While, as I mentioned above, Foucault does not analyze the complex relationship between power relations and economic relations, his account of biopolitics raises some guiding questions for us: how do racial power relations and economic relations “constitute a sort of network or loop?”<sup>xiv</sup> What economic relations are involved in the optimization of a state of life? How does racism function in the constitution of the population as an object of *economic* knowledge? In order to clarify the relations between biopolitical racism and economic relations, it is necessary to consider more closely the development of liberalism and American neoliberalism, because, as Foucault put it, “only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is.”<sup>xv</sup>

## Enemy of the Population, Enemy of the Economy

Foucault begins his account of the development of liberal strategies of government in the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures with an analysis of mechanisms of security. As Foucault notes, developing French towns in the eighteenth century confronted growing floating populations of beggars, vagrants, and thieves. Not only did these delinquents refuse to work, but, continually on the move, they avoided taxes, randomly abandoned their offspring, producing idle populations in the places through which they passed, and looted and stole from local villages.<sup>xvi</sup> The constant risks posed by the presence of these floating populations presented the task of “organizing circulation, eliminating its dangerous elements, making a division between good and bad circulation, and maximizing the good circulation by diminishing the bad,”<sup>xvii</sup> with these dangerous elements appearing “as social enemies through the violent power they exercise on the population and through the position they occupy in the process of production by their refusal to work.”<sup>xviii</sup> Mechanisms of security are developed at this time in order to, not simply punish (banish, fine, execute, etc.), nor confine, supervise, and correct crime, but to employ forecasts and statistical estimates for the management “of criminality, theft for instance, within socially and economically acceptable limits and around an average that will be considered optimal for a given social functioning.”<sup>xix</sup> They did not aim to eliminate criminality, but to establish an average considered optimal and “a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded.”<sup>xx</sup> The phenomenon in question is thus treated within a calculation of costs in which “the fundamental question is economics and the economic relation between the cost of repression and the cost of delinquency.”<sup>xxi</sup> This analysis, optimization, and management of behavioral trends and dynamics and associated costs focused on the level of the population, “the object and subject” of mechanisms of security.<sup>xxii</sup> The population as object of economic knowledge thus co-emerges with the figure of the social enemy, the continual danger he poses to society, and his “crimes against the economy.”<sup>xxiii</sup> The question now is, how do liberal strategies of government deal with this social enemy? In order to answer this question, we must consider the role of the social enemy in another problem French towns faced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: food scarcity.

## Starvation Secures the Population

Local French governments of this time continually faced the problem of food shortages, which inevitably resulted in a dangerous cycle between increased prices and increased risk of monopolization. The primary danger for these governments was not that some of their subjects might starve, but that food shortages would occur in the urban milieu and lead to urban revolt.<sup>xxiv</sup> In an effort to stave off such disturbances, governments attempted to prevent food shortages from ever taking place by controlling prices, storage, export, and cultivation of grain.<sup>xxv</sup> This system of constraints aimed to promote the continual and efficient introduction of grain into the market so as to ensure a consistent food supply. The problem with this approach, however, was that prevention of hoarding and artificial regulation of grain prices meant little, if any, profit for peasants, and, as a consequence, decreased sowing of grain the following year. The slightest climatic irregularity would thus jeopardize grain production, ultimately causing the very shortages that were to be avoided.<sup>xxvi</sup>

It was at this time that Abeille, the physiocrats, and the economic theorists of the eighteenth century began to develop strategies for analyzing grain scarcity and high prices, not as evils to be avoided, but as natural phenomena to be “compensated for, checked, finally limited, and, in the final degree, canceled out, without it being prevented or losing any of its reality.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Their techniques would no longer constrain prices, storage, export, and cultivation, but, on the contrary, allow free circulation to proceed as a natural, inevitable market process. Grain producers would be allowed to self-regulate the production, storage, sale, and export of their grain based on the state of the market, with increasing grain prices authorized, even favored. While these strategies allowed for both grain abundance and relatively high prices, and thus

provided a more effective apparatus for the avoidance of mass food shortages, they only prevented food shortages at the level of the population.<sup>xxviii</sup> Increasing grain prices meant that some individuals, or sub-populations, would be allowed to die of hunger in order to ensure the production of abundance at the level of the population. As Foucault puts it, “scarcity that causes the death of individuals not only does not disappear, it must not disappear.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Insofar as certain sub-populations are left die in order to ensure the security of the population, they are effectively instrumentalized, treated as mere means to a greater social end. This instrumentalization is never total, however; it produces a residue, “the people,”<sup>xxx</sup> sub-populations who, faced with increasing food prices, local shortages, and, ultimately, impending starvation, decide to organize local revolts to re-appropriate and re-distribute food supplies. Refusing to be instruments of the population, the people disrupt the system, marking themselves as social enemies.<sup>xxxi</sup> While these strategies of government, “linked to the general principle of what is called liberalism,”<sup>xxxii</sup> were developed in order to avoid the disruptive effects of grain shortages, they also produced the continual danger of residual sub-populations who, left to die, might at any point decide to take matters into their own hands.

From this example we begin to see how the governmental deployment of specific economic knowledges and strategies enables the homeostatic regulation of social functioning in a manner which makes the population live and lets sub-populations die. What is not yet clear, however, is *which* sub-populations are left to die by these strategies. Are they selected randomly by the natural fluctuations of the market? How might the economic management of the population involve the strategic selective elimination of specific, racialized sub-populations? To what extent do these economic strategies, in allowing sub-populations to die and/or fend for themselves, involve the selective elimination of sub-optimal states of life? What becomes of the residual sub-populations? In what ways do they take matters into their own hands, and how are they managed and regulated? In order to clarify the above questions, we must consider how the fundamental priority liberal strategies of government ascribe to the market constitutes *homo economicus*.

## The Market of Life and Death

Foucault notes that the liberal strategies of government developed at this time provided “at once an analysis of what happens and a program for what should happen.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> The programmatic implementation of this analysis required that it be broadened to take into account the world grain market as well as the calculative behavior of potential market-actors: “All of this, that is to say that completely concrete element of the behavior of *homo economicus*, must also be taken into account. In other words, it is an economics, or a political-economic analysis, that integrates the moment of production, the world market, and, finally, the economic behavior of the population, of producers and consumers.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> The figure of *homo economicus*, I suggest, provides one model for the identification of optimal and sub-optimal states of life. Further, it enables the differential instrumentalization of sub-populations so that *specific, racialized* sub-populations are selectively eliminated, with residual sub-populations managed and regulated accordingly. Not only will states enable these mechanisms, but, with state intervention taking on “the essential function of ensuring the security of the natural phenomena of economic processes or processes intrinsic to population,” the assurance of their efficient functioning will become its responsibility.<sup>xxxv</sup>

We have seen how the liberal strategy to allow individuals as market-actors to produce, store, sell, and export grain as they pleased ensured food abundance at the level of the population. This freeing up of the market, allowing its apparently natural, inevitable fluctuations to ensure the security of the population, is a partial example indicating the extent to which the market becomes, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the site of veridiction of governmental practice:

“In other words, it is the natural mechanism of the market and the formation of a natural price that enables us to falsify and verify governmental practice, when, on the basis of these elements, we examine what government does, the measures it takes, and the rules it imposes.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The evaluation of governmental strategies and tactics becomes linked with the market as site of exchange, their effectiveness determined by the extent to which they interfere with the natural truth of the market. In other words, liberal governmental practice must continually produce, organize, and manage the freedom of the market,<sup>xxxvii</sup> and this continual task is, as I have partially indicated, intricately interrelated with the problems of security and danger. If individuals living under liberal government “are conditioned to experience their situation, their life, their present, and their future as containing danger,” then it seems that others, less fortunate, are continually exposed to danger on a much more immediate level. This continual exposure to danger is thus produced by the market, the freedom of which, in the eighteenth century, would “be a source of the state’s enrichment, growth, and therefore power.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

As Foucault points out, the centrality of the market is the crucial problem of present-day liberalism, the problem of how to bring about “the general formalization of the powers of the state and the organization of society on the basis of the market.”<sup>xxxix</sup> If the problem for the eighteenth century was the freeing of the economy, the problem since the mid-

twentieth century has been that of “knowing how far the market economy’s powers of political and social information extend”<sup>xli</sup> and “how the exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy”<sup>xlii</sup> in the pursuit of the “only true and fundamental social policy: economic growth.”<sup>xliii</sup> From this perspective, government adopts the task of intervention on “society as such, in its fabric and depth” in order to ensure “a general regulation of society by the market.”<sup>xliiii</sup> This task takes on its most radical, complete, and exhaustive appearance, according to Foucault, with American neo-liberalism.

## Life as Entrepreneurship

The distinguishing characteristic of American neo-liberalism is the introduction of labor into the field of economic analysis. The abstraction of labor, identified by Marxian economists as a product of the logic of capitalism, was, according to early American neo-liberals, a result of the inadequacy of economic theory. Economic theory had simply failed to take into account the worker as an active economic subject, a rational, calculating agent.<sup>xliv</sup> From the perspective of the worker, the wage paid by an employer appears as an income, a product or return on a capital consisting of “the set of all those physical and psychological factors which make someone able to earn this or that wage.”<sup>xlv</sup> On this account, the wage of the worker, the worker’s income, depends upon the worker’s “capital-ability,” which varies according to the diverse inherited and acquired elements of his/her human capital. The worker is thus identified with *homo economicus*, not as partner of exchange, but “as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”<sup>xlvi</sup> From this perspective, all social relations and practices, from education, to child-rearing, to medicine and other activities concerning health, health care, and public hygiene are analyzed as potential contributors to or risks on the formation of human capital.<sup>xlvii</sup> All social phenomena become analyzable in terms of the model of entrepreneurial decision-making in the market economy. Even the criminal is treated as a rational, calculating agent “who invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and who accepts the risk of a loss.”<sup>xlviii</sup> All individuals are thus treated as calculative market-actors, entrepreneurs, making choices in pursuit of their own self-interest, seeking to maximize returns on their human capital. Individuals with high incomes are then those who most skillfully and rationally invest in their human capital.<sup>xlix</sup> What of those with low incomes? As Wendy Brown puts it:

“The rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits.”<sup>l</sup>

They have no one to blame but themselves. Life itself is evaluated in terms of its capabilities for efficient economic investment.

If the body of the state, the population, is treated as a mass of entrepreneurs, each investing in his/her own private human capital in pursuit of private self-interest, if the one true and fundamental social policy is economic growth, and if all social relations and practices are analyzed in terms of economic decision-making, then, on some level, *life itself* has been subsumed under the economy. Optimal states of life are those that invest most efficiently in their own human capital through full participation in state-sanctioned spheres of the market economy. The selective elimination of sub-populations thus *appears* as the *self-selected elimination* of incapable investors from the market economy, the self-selected elimination of sub-optimal *lives* from *life itself*. These failed entrepreneurs are simply losers in the “lottery of life,”<sup>li</sup> and/or people with poor attitudes and poor choices.<sup>lii</sup> From this perspective, the population is hierarchized and fragmented into sub-populations situated differently depending on the entrepreneurial capacities of their constituent members. Those who invest wisely flourish; they make *themselves* live. Those who do not are left to fend for themselves; they let *themselves* die, or become social enemies. To the extent that differently situated sub-populations are treated as statistical elements contributing to varying degrees to the primary aim of the effective development of the market economy, they are instrumentalized as market-actors, the only difference resting in the *form* of their instrumentalization. Sub-populations composed of successful entrepreneurs, pursuing optimal states of life, are instrumentalized as active *subjects* of the market economy, ‘job creators’ and ‘innovators.’ Those composed of failed entrepreneurs, possessors of poor human capital, unfortunate bearers of sub-optimal states of life, are instrumentalized as passive and reactive *objects* of the market economy. As objects of the market economy, they are not simply failed entrepreneurs or possessors of poor human capital, but, potentially, reactive dangers and threats to the market economy, and must be managed and regulated accordingly.<sup>liii</sup>

It is in this sense, then, that *homo economicus*, the entrepreneur, operates as one model for the delineation of optimal and sub-optimal states of life and the strategic, selective elimination of the latter. As we shall see, ‘failed entrepreneurs’ are not simply selectively eliminated, they are managed and regulated in a manner which effectively reinscribes them in the circulating flows of the market economy. As I hope to demonstrate, the deployment of the figure of the entrepreneur as programmatic model for the development, organization, and reproduction of social life ultimately

serves to divide sub-populations along racial lines. We proceed, then, with a consideration of President Barack Obama's 2013 commencement speech at Morehouse College.<sup>liv</sup> As we shall see, the discursive deployment of the entrepreneurial model functions to selectively sort optimal life, active entrepreneurial subjects of the market economy, from sub-optimal life, passive/reactive failed entrepreneurial objects of the market economy. Because the entrepreneurial model is fundamentally ahistorical and apolitical, its deployment against racialized sub-populations effaces the history of slavery, further aggravating racial inequalities and contributing to the production of racialized dangers and threats to the population.<sup>lv</sup>

## Who's Got Time for Slavery?

The overarching tone of President Obama's speech is captured in his praise of the (male) Morehouse graduates of 2013 as developing leaders "for the entire American community" who "will continue the never-ending task of perfecting our union," heirs to a legacy of leadership, resolute fearlessness, and responsibility, "what being an American is all about." The Morehouse graduates are addressed as moral exemplars of American values. Their task, however, is not simply moral, but economic. As Obama puts it:

"[...]in today's hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil – many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did – all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned."

The moral cultivation of exemplary leadership, fearlessness, and responsibility, is thus, in practice, necessary preparation for entrance into a hypercompetitive global market economy: "If you think you can just get over in this economy just because you have a Morehouse degree, you're in for a rude awakening." Moral leadership here is thus presented as a necessary element of an effective entrepreneurial spirit: "But if you stay hungry, if you keep hustling, if you keep on your grind and get other folks to do the same – nobody can stop you." The fate of each graduate thus rests in his own hands. The only question is whether he cultivates the will and intention necessary to be successful, or whether he remains satisfied with bad choices and excuses.

Obama addresses the legacy of slavery, segregation, racism, and discrimination only to dismiss it as a source of excuses, and "we've got no time for excuses." He continues:

"Nobody cares how tough your upbringing was. Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination. And moreover, you have to remember that whatever you've gone through, it pales in comparison to the hardships previous generations endured — and they overcame them. And if they overcame them, you can overcome them, too."

Slavery and racism are thus no longer effective historico-political realities which must be confronted as such, but inconveniences, sources of excuses which, though "still out there," must be overcome through private initiative. Young men in the community simply "continue to make bad choices," just like Obama once did: "Sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down." While Obama does encourage the graduates "to be engaged on the barbershops, on the basketball court, at church, [to] spend time and energy and presence to give people opportunities and a chance," the rhetoric of entrepreneurial initiative and the disavowal of slavery and racism reduces community engagement to the apolitical, ahistorical cultivation of private dreams and entrepreneurial spirits in pursuit of national greatness.<sup>lvi</sup> Thus, as Charles Mills notes in his analysis of the film *Trading Places*,

"We are not being persuaded to demand a new United States, a new city whose light, through the dismantling of the dark ghetto, will truly shine for all. Rather, we are being told that all that is necessary is for the gates of that city to be opened to the entrepreneurial."<sup>lvii</sup>

Obama's discursive deployment of the entrepreneurial model demonstrates how human capital and entrepreneurship have been racialized in neoliberal America. The legacy of slavery continues to exert significant material effects on racialized sub-populations,<sup>lviii</sup> which means that they are put at a radical disadvantage when it comes to entering the market economy as active, productive subjects. The entrepreneurial model for social management and organization is thus always already racialized. Disavowal of the historico-political reality of slavery and its institutional descendants, Jim Crow, hyper-ghettoization and the prison system,<sup>lix</sup> automatically reinforces and aggravates racial boundaries accrued over centuries of material and symbolic domination. The fantasy that everyone starts at the same place and that, if not, they can get to the same place if only they "stop making excuses" and "take responsibility for their lives," functions as a socio-political sieve, separating out the winners from the losers, optimal from sub-optimal states of life. The former,

instrumentalized as active subjects of the market economy, are showered with praise and admiration. The latter, instrumentalized as passive and/or reactive objects of the market economy, are abandoned to fend for themselves.<sup>lx</sup> Residual sub-populations who refuse to play the game and decide, instead, to take matters into their own hands, the “illegitimate capitalists,”<sup>lxi</sup> are identified as social enemies by the discursive security apparatuses of liberal government, and ultimately funneled back into the vortex of the market economy via the prison system.

## Failed Entrepreneurs, Reinvested Life, and the Market Vortex

Loic Wacquant writes, “The expansion and glorification of the penal arm of the state (centered on the prison in the USA and led by the police in the EU) is not an anomalous deviation from or a corruption of neo-liberalism, but, on the contrary, is one of its core constituent components.”<sup>lxii</sup> Our discussion thus far provides one perspective on how the penal system indeed constitutes a core component of the neo-liberal state. Centuries of material and symbolic domination are wished away, with racialized sub-populations presented as people who simply fail to effectively invest in themselves. These failed entrepreneurs, faced with the threat of unemployment, poverty, and social degradation, resort to a life of crime (and other bad choices), and find themselves sucked into the “endless circulation through penal circuits (police, court, jail, prison and their organizational tentacles: probation, parole, criminal justice databases, etc.).”<sup>lxiii</sup> This endless circulation, according to Wacquant, functions “as instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups.”<sup>lxiv</sup>

It is important to note that the task of the prison system and associated “organizational tentacles,” for Wacquant, is primarily disciplinary: to entrap younger black men, impose desocialized wage labor as a norm of citizenship, and keep “(unskilled) African Americans ‘in their place,’ i.e. in a subordinate and confined position in physical, social, and symbolic space.”<sup>lxv</sup> The ghetto, increasingly resembling the prison system, has “devolved into a one-dimensional machinery for naked relegation, a human warehouse wherein are discarded those segments of urban society deemed disreputable, derelict, and dangerous,” and serves “the *negative economic function of a surplus population* devoid of market utility.”<sup>lxvi</sup> If the account I have been developing is accurate, however, the function of the ghetto-prison “carceral continuum” is more insidious.

So far we have seen how liberal strategies of government instrumentalize sub-populations in order to ensure effects at the level of the population (food abundance, economic growth). We have also seen how the neo-liberal model of the entrepreneur functions to situate different sub-populations differently with respect to the market economy and the one true and fundamental social policy of economic growth. Sub-populations composed of successful entrepreneurs are identified as optimal states of life and supported accordingly. Those composed of failed entrepreneurs are identified as sub-optimal states of life, dangers and threats to the development of the market economy and its market-actors, and managed and regulated accordingly. As I have discussed, the ahistorical, apolitical nature of neo-liberal entrepreneurialism effaces the history and effects of slavery, and thus serves to reinforce and aggravate racial segregation and antagonisms. Racialized sub-populations are expected to work twice as hard, and when they fail to live up to the impossible demands of the market economy, the sole regulator of social life, they are funneled into the endless circulation of the penal system. If the primary task of social policy is to ensure economic growth, the foundation of our national security,<sup>lxvii</sup> then residual sub-populations are not “devoid of market utility” by virtue of their apparent inability to invest in themselves. The “carceral continuum” does more than sequester and discipline residual sub-populations, it *invests* in the techniques and procedures of the management and regularization of *their life*. Through the carceral continuum, the market economy invests in the *lives* of those who are unable to invest in themselves. The carceral continuum, in fact, involves a web of political and economic investments which do not simply aim to discipline and confine marginalized sub-populations, but to profit from the techniques and procedures of their discipline and confinement.<sup>lxviii</sup> The figure of the entrepreneur, the investment in suboptimal states of life, and the ‘carceral continuum’ are thus intricately interdependent.

## Conclusion

I have attempted to trace some of the relationships between contemporary neoliberalism and biopolitics by developing an account of the biopolitical efficacy of neoliberal strategies of government.<sup>lxix</sup> Specifically, I have indicated some of the ways in which the neo-liberal model of the entrepreneur operates as an instrument of biopolitical racism through the effacement of the historical, political-economic legacy of slavery and its descendant institutions. This, in combination with liberal strategies of government that instrumentalize sub-populations as market-actors, results in the intensification of racial antagonisms and inequalities. Racialized sub-populations, depicted as ‘failed entrepreneurs’ and ‘social enemies,’ are eliminated as sub-optimal states of life and re-inscribed into the circulating flows of the market

economy via the ‘carceral continuum.’ Biopolitical racism and neoliberal economic strategies of government thus operate in continual, dynamic, and symbiotic transaction with one another. The abolition of racism requires the abolition of the mechanisms which sustain and reproduce racism, mechanisms which simultaneously operate to reproduce racialized capitalism. This requires that we confront the problem of the historical, political-economic legacy of slavery and its descendant institutions, especially the prison-industrial complex, and work to resist and reconfigure one of their many supporting discursive and strategic elements: the entrepreneur.

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Newton, Huey P., “freedom,” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, David Hilliar and Donald Weise (eds.), New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002.
- <sup>ii</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended, Lectures at the College de France*, [1975-1976], Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana and Arnold I. Davidson (eds.), transl. David Macey, (New York: Picador, 2003), 13.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.
- <sup>xiv</sup> See footnote 4, page 2.
- <sup>xv</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979*, Arnold Davidson, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (eds.) and trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society, Lectures at the College de France*, [1972-1973], Francisco Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Arnold I. Davidson (eds.), transl. Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 47.
- <sup>xvii</sup> STP, 18.
- <sup>xviii</sup> PS., 49.
- <sup>xix</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population, Lectures at the College de France*, [1977-1978], Francisco Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Arnold I. Davidson (eds.), transl. Graham Burchell, (New York: Picador, 2007), 5.
- It is important to note here that mechanisms of security do not displace disciplinary and juridico-legal (sovereign) mechanisms. Rather, these constitute “a series of complex edifices in which, of course, the techniques themselves are changed and are perfected, or anyway become more complicated, but in which what above all changes is the dominant characteristic, or more exactly, the system of correlation between juridico-legal mechanisms, disciplinary mechanisms, and mechanisms of security.” *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>xxii</sup> STP., 11.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> PS., 45-46.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> STP., 30.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Foucault uses the terms “individuals” and “multiplicity of individuals” to refer to those allowed to starve to death. I employ the term “sub-populations” in order to emphasize their relation to the population as a whole. *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Foucault uses the term ‘residue’ in the Psychiatric Power lectures: “Disciplinary systems[...]which classify, hierarchize, supervise, and so on, come up against those who cannot be classified, those who escape supervision, those who cannot enter the system of distribution, in short, the residual, the irreducible, the unclassifiable, the inassimilable[...]So the necessary existence of residues[...]will entail, of course, the appearance of supplementary disciplinary systems in order to retrieve these individuals, and so on to infinity.” While he employs the term to characterize inassimilable individuals, the fact that supplementary systems are required to retrieve them indicates that these are not isolated cases, but significant groups of individuals, i.e., sub-populations.
- Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power, Lectures at the College de France*, [1973-1974], Francisco Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Arnold I. Davidson (eds.), transl. Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 53-54.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> STP., 44.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> “The game of liberalism – not interfering, allowing free movement, letting things follow their course; *laissez faire, passer et aller* – basically and fundamentally means acting so that reality develops, goes its way, and following its own course according to the laws, principles, and mechanisms of reality itself.” *Ibid.*, 48.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 352-3.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France [1978-1979]*, Arnold Davidson, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (eds.) and trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 32.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> As well as “the freedom to buy and sell, the free exercise of property rights, freedom of discussion, possible freedom of expression, and so on.” The focus here, however, is on individuals as market-actors, homo economicus, and, therefore, freedom of the market. *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>xl</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>xlii</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>xliii</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>xliv</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>xlv</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>xlvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>xlvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>xlx</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory & Event* 7, no. 1 (2003): 6.

<sup>ii</sup> American economist Milton Friedman employed the term “lottery of life” as part of an argument against progressive taxation. As he put it: “Most differences of status or position or wealth can be regarded as the product of chance at a far enough remove. The man who is hard working and thrifty is to be regarded as “deserving”; yet these qualities owe much to the genes he was fortunate (or unfortunate?) enough to inherit.” Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 164, 166.

<sup>iii</sup> Kiyosaki, Robert T., and Sharon L. Lechter. *Rich Dad, Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach Their Kids About Money-- That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not!* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2000).

<sup>iiii</sup> As President Obama put it in the 2015 National Security Strategy, “America’s growing economic strength is the foundation of our national security[...],” and “The American economy is an engine for global economic growth and a source of stability for the international system. In addition to being a key measure of power and influence in its own right, it underwrites our military strength and diplomatic influence. A strong economy, combined with a prominent U.S. presence in the global financial system, creates opportunities to advance our security.” Threats to the engine of economic growth, the market economy, are thus threats to national security. It seems important to note here that economic growth is measured either as gross domestic product, an aggregate measure of the gross values added by “all resident producers,” or GDP per capita, GDP divided by midyear population. In either case, economic growth is measured in terms of the productivity of the population. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/06/fact-sheet-2015-national-security-strategy> On GDP see: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD>

<sup>lv</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/19/remarks-president-morehouse-college-commencement-ceremony>

<sup>lv</sup> A recent study by Stanford and Harvard political scientists presents evidence showing that “the larger the number of slaves per capita in his or her country of residence in 1860, the greater the probability that a white Southerner today will identify as a Republican, oppose affirmative action, and express positions that indicate of some level of ‘racial resentment.’” They suggest that postbellum white Southern elites had political and economic incentives to promote formal and informal institutional anti-black violence in response to emancipation. These incentives thus functioned to amplify differences in white racial hostility which are observable today. They also provide evidence showing “that areas of the South that were the first to eliminate political and economic incentives for anti-black violence – for example by adopting new technologies such as tractors that reduced the demand for black farm labor – are also the areas in which slavery’s long term affects have most attenuated.” The study thus confirms the central (albeit partial) role of political economy in aggravating and ameliorating race relations. See: Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. Submitted. “The Political Legacy of American Slavery,” 1. Available at <http://scholar.harvard.edu/msen/cations/american-slavery-political-legacy>

<sup>lvi</sup> As Ben Carson put it in a Fox interview: “And what we need to recognize as a country -- and this is crucial -- we only have 330 million people. We're competing against China and India. They have over a billion people. We can't afford to be throwing away a good portion of our people. We need to develop all of them to the maximum. It's going to help us as a nation and strengthen the fabric of our country.” <http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2015/08/12/ben-carson-tackles-race-issues-in-harlem-as-poll-numbers-surge-in-iowa/>

<sup>lvii</sup> “Race as/and (Ex)Change: Trading Places and the Rise of Neoliberalism,” in Mary K. Bloods worth-Lugo and Dan Flory, eds., *Race, Philosophy, and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 161.

<sup>lviii</sup> See: Gaskin, Darrell, J. Headen, and Alvin White-Means. “Racial Disparities in Health and Wealth: The Effects of Slavery and past Discrimination.” *The Review of Black Political Economy* 32, no. 3 (2005): 95-110. Bertocchi, Graziella, and Dimico, Arcangelo. “The Racial Gap in Education and the Legacy of Slavery.” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 40, no. 4 (2012): 581-95. Bertocchi, Graziella, and Dimico, Arcangelo. “Slavery, Education, and Inequality.” *European Economic Review* 70 (2014): 197-209. Soares, Rodrigo R., Assunção, Juliano J., and Goulart, Tomás F. “A Note on Slavery and the Roots of Inequality.” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 40, no. 4 (2012): 565-80. Connell, Heather A. “The Impact of Slavery on Racial Inequality in Poverty in the Contemporary U.S. South.” *Social Forces* 90, no. 3 (2012): 713-34.

<sup>lix</sup> Loic Wacquant argues quite convincingly that, since the 1970s, ghettos and prisons have come to resemble one another, and now form a “carceral continuum.” “Deadly Symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh,” *Punishment & Society*, Vol 3(1):95-134, 2001.

<sup>lx</sup> In another interview, Ben Carson, reflecting on ‘cycles of dependency’ in the inner-city, asks: “How do we, in fact, make sure that that woman [single (black) mother] can get her GED, her associate’s degree, her bachelor’s degree, her master’s degree, learn how to fend for herself, learn how to teach her family to do that?” While he appeals to traditional family values as a solution, he also questions the notion that “every lifestyle is exactly of the same value,” implying that single black motherhood is a lifestyle choice. Here, then, moral conservatism is coupled with the economic evaluation of different states of life. Single black motherhood, as it turns out, ranks poorly for its contribution to poverty and prison rates.

<sup>lxi</sup> Newton, Huey P., “freedom,” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, David Hilliar and Donald Weise (eds.), New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002.

<sup>lxii</sup> “Marginality, ethnicity and penalty in the neo-liberal city: an analytic cartography,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 10, 2014, 1694.

<sup>lxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 1701.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Wacquant, Loic, “Deadly Symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh,” *Punishment & Society*, Vol 3(1):95-134, 2001, 95.

<sup>lxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 97.

<sup>lxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 107, 105.

<sup>lxvii</sup> See footnote, page 4.

<sup>lxviii</sup> A Center for Economic and Policy Research study concluded that a reduction by one-half of the incarceration rate of non-violent offenders would lower correctional expenditures by \$16.9 billion per year. The authors note, however, that the large majority of these savings would accrue to state and local governments. Thus, while a reduction of the incarceration rate would lead to public savings, it would also lead to reduced profits for the various private interests invested in the prison system. We might consider here, for example, private prison industry lobbying in support of legislation which would increase incarceration rates. See: Cervantes-Gautschi, P. (June 10 2010). Wall street and the criminalization of immigrants. America’s Program. Retrieved from:

<http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/3304>

Sullivan, L. (Oct 28 2010). Prison economics help drive Arizona immigration law. National Public Radio. Retrieved from:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130833741>, and

Cohen, M. (April 28 2015). How for-profit prisons have become the biggest lobby no one is talking about. The Washington Post.

Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/04/28/how-for-profit-prisons-have-become-the-biggest-lobby-no-one-is-talking-about/>

CEPR study: Schmitt, John, Kris Warner, and Sarika Gupta. (June 2010). The High Budgetary Cost of Incarceration. Retrieved from:

<http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/incarceration-2010-06.pdf>

The emergence of the prison-industrial complex thus cannot be understood independently of the emergence of neo-liberal economic strategies of government. At least one theorist, Phillip J. Wood, situates the rise of the prison-industrial complex in a series of broader structures and tendencies including “the uneven development of American capitalism, global overproduction, privatization, rentierization, flexibilization, neo-liberal restructuring and zero-sum politics at the national level [...]” “The Rise of the Prison-Industrial Complex in the United States” in Andrew Coyle, Allison Campbell and Rodney Neufeld, (eds.), *Capitalist Punishment: Prison Privatization and Human Rights*. (Atlanta, GA and London: Clarity Press and Zed Books, 2003), 27.

<sup>lxix</sup> A recent collection of essays on biopolitics and neoliberalism provides little analysis of race and racism and none of the biopolitical function of neoliberalism. An essay by Muhle develops an account of neoliberal biopolitics in which power functions by reference to a polarity intrinsic to biological life. My account differs in that I seek to track biopolitical mechanisms by reference to neoliberal governmentality, and not vice versa. Lemm, Vanessa, and Vatter, Miguel, eds. *Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

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