

Coloring the Past, Considerations on Our Future: RaceB4Race

Margo Hendricks

THIS ESSAY IS NOT ONE I THOUGHT to write when asked to contribute to this issue. My expectation was that I would submit a simple revision of “Coloring the Past, Rewriting Our Future: RaceB4Race” (the keynote lecture from which this paper emerges), only along scholarly lines. Yet, as history has long proven, what people intend and what they actually produce may be very different. I now find myself in a different writing space and less wedded to academic rhetoric. This essay, then, is a thought piece, a forward-facing reflection on the public humanities. It is also autobiographical in certain respects, since I am an academic who once struggled to find a place within the academy but no longer do. Thus, this meditation/mediation has two parts. Part One is retrospective: a look back at my place in an effort to decolonize my professional relationship to the academy and the discipline where my intellectual efforts are housed, the field of early modern English literature and culture (where I once landed not fully by choice). Part Two is a letter to and for Black, Indigenous, Peoples of Color (BIPOC) colleagues and allies.

On Periodization

My initial professional interest was in medieval culture with an end date of Elizabeth I’s death. I was intrigued by the political, cultural, and literary dynamics generated by the emergence of a national literature in the wake of the Norman/French colonization of England. My doctoral institution had a somewhat traditional scheme for graduate work. A student chose a field (medieval, renaissance, eighteenth century, Victorian, modern, which included British and American literatures), a theoretical framework, and a topic. Of course, this occurred only after the study of the literature of all these eras. Despite my intent to study the Middle Ages, I ended up working on later periods. At the time, I assumed this was a result of my being an older Black woman who wasn’t enamored

with the trappings of the Ivory Tower or with the idea that literature could be so easily parsed, that there wasn't a degree of continuity beyond the shared use of English among the so-called periods.

Although it wasn't entirely clear to me at the time, I have since learned my decision was an effect of the often unquestioned form of academic gatekeeping known as periodization. The redirection nonetheless proved immeasurably valuable as it made me the activist-scholar/humanist that I have come to be. The gatekeeping also led to intellectual work and publications that contributed to the emergence of my commitment to the study of race in early modern English literature and culture. In a piece titled "Obscured by dreams: Race, Empire and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (the only of my publications about which I will still unapologetically declare, "Damn, that was good"), I put it this way:

Somehow, giving our silent *mestizo* [the Indian Boy] the voice of another *mestizo*, rather than that of an academic like myself, seems fitting. The words of this half-Scottish/half-Irish changeling stand as a vivid reminder that it was in the "antique fables," the "fairy toys" produced in the colonizing dreams of Europeans, that the "shaping fantasies" of modern imperialism began. These words are a reminder that it will be the *mestizos*—the racialized descendants of those who framed the lexicon and practices of modern imperialism—who, dealing with it, will write the final epilogue to the shaping fantasy of race.¹

"Obscured by dreams" was preceded by *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (coedited with Patricia Parker for Routledge Press, 1994). *Women, "Race," and Writing* reflected, though we didn't conceptualize it as such at the time, an attempt to grapple with the emerging field of critical race theory and the idea of intersectionality while privileging our "own voices" (women). The collection of cross-disciplinary essays illuminated the intersection of gender, racial ideologies, and settler colonialism as the early modern embarked on a campaign of global expansion. Even now, the impact of that expansion remains visibly etched on the descendants of individuals and communities subjugated as part of colonial and racist practices.

The final piece in this triptych was a University of California Humanities Research Institute residency group, "Theorizing Race in Pre- and Early Modern Contexts." Faculty members of this group represented traditionally articulated periods and disciplines: classics, medieval, early modern, literature, history, and art history. What we quickly realized was that race and racial thinking didn't quite fit into those rubrics. Two decades later, the problem of race and periodization continues, largely due to academic gatekeeping. On the surface, it seems illogical to insist on rigid categories and temporalities when it comes to premodern

cultures. As a doctoral student in English literature, I was expected to focus on a “century” or an “age” (sixteenth or seventeenth, Elizabethan or Stuart). Never one for conformity, I committed to something like a century—one that began circa 1560 and ended circa 1690. My rationale was one of continuity, especially since some writers and their careers spanned the reigns of at least two monarchs (the writings of William Shakespeare, John Donne, and Ben Jonson, for example, were Elizabethan and Jacobean). Also, I had discovered the writings of Aphra Behn.

Periodization made no sense to me during my graduate school days, and it is definitely illogical when it comes to considering race in premodern cultures. Despite all efforts to construct monolithic historical narratives about race’s origins (tied to the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved African peoples), transnational and cross-cultural permutations existed pre-Enlightenment. In addition, the European construction of racial taxonomies was an ongoing process subject to fits and starts, evolution and entrenchment. My fascination with this process, itself a repudiation of periodization, has not waned. In fact, it calls into question the notion that periodization is the best structure for historical analysis. It is this questioning, this interrogation of centuries of arbitrary enclosures, that Premodern Critical Race Studies (PCRS) has made visible, and for those who want the “origins story,” here it is.

Premodern Race Studies

Before the 1980s, the study of race in premodern cultures sat very much on the margins, localized by the focus on an isolated text or character. Traditional historiography’s presumptions about the absence of peoples of color on the European continent fed the illusion of race’s insignificance in premodern cultures. In addition, the argument that race is an Enlightenment concept—ideologically, scientifically, and politically linked to the enslavement and/or extrication of indigenous African and US peoples from their lands during European imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—led to an inattentiveness to premodern race-making and racism. The exception: characters like Aaron, Ithamore, or Othello were granted status as standard-bearers for an emerging ideology of racial thinking. What this meant for individuals arguing that race, racial taxonomies, and racism were fundamental to premodern European cultures was a form of academic pushback. The study of race in “medieval,” “renaissance,” or “ancient” literatures and history was viewed as an imposition of a modern sensibility, a political agenda. The study of pre-Enlightenment race was considered a “niche”

topic, problematic when it came to publication, employment, and tenure or promotion. Non-white graduate students interested in studying premodern race were gently discouraged or openly denied. So we wrote about humanist values, literary conventions and tropes, and genres.

While there was no single cataclysmic explosion, several detonations silenced naysayers and signaled a fundamental theoretical shift in the study of the past: Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Kim Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, and *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker.² The publication of these books challenged a white-centric cultural, literary, economic, and philosophical vision of premodern cultures and the modes of periodization that defined the humanities. In essence, what these three studies did was expose the entrenched tenets of white supremacy inside the academy, especially during the heyday of the so-called Culture Wars. What emerged from this critical intervention was, I would argue, a theoretical foundation that would become premodern critical race studies.

What *Black Athena* brought to the table was attention to the fabrication of a white "Western Civilization" formation. *Things of Darkness* and *Women, "Race," and Writing* pushed the critique even further by insisting on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as part of global capitalist expansion, especially with the advent of white settler colonialism and its anti-Black and anti-Indigenous campaigns. The genius of *Things of Darkness* and *Women, "Race," and Writing* as analyses was the "positional subjectivity" from which the authors and contributors approached their topics; that is, there was an authorial awareness/self-awareness of the intersecting threads of race, class, gender, and sexuality. What sets these works apart is how the authors situate themselves and their analyses in relation to a historical past and the sovereign bodies that make up that past—in essence, a bidirectional gaze.

A bidirectional gaze is one that looks inward even as it looks outward. As bell hooks observed, "Spaces of agency exist . . . wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The 'gaze' has been and is a site of resistance for colonized . . . people globally."³ The tendency to dissociate from this mode of interrogation is, in my view, what differentiates PCRS from its "white" cousin, Premodern Race Studies (PRS). What often goes amiss with PRS is the looking back and naming what the inquirer "sees": white supremacy and whiteness as a normative marker that somehow eludes race. This practice is most visible in the arguments for seeing blood, religion, gender, or ethnicity as racial taxonomies. These positions fail to consider capitalism's use of colorism, anti-Blackness, or anti-Indigeneity

to further its economic and ideological (?) aims. The argument for seeing race as a trope does little to dismantle white supremacy as settler colonialism's hegemonic pulse. When somatic color becomes immaterial or just a difference to be noted in the same way as religion or gender or ethnicity, the exercise leaves intact an unexamined default. When deployed this way, gender or religion becomes a racial category. While race's premodern semantic fluidity is unquestionable, by the seventeenth century (at least in England) race as a purely biophysical label was establishing firm roots. What's lost in the premodern analyses of race as "fill in the blank" is the connection between a somatic, sovereign Indigenous body and the pernicious effects of settler colonialism and capitalism.

Under these conditions, PRS engages in a theoretical and political failure to "look back," to critically examine one's white subjectivity and positionality in relation to the non-white bodies that gave race its currency during the advent of settler colonialism. Instead, much of PRS operates in the same manner as white settler colonialism. The study of race requires no "oppositional gaze" or "intersectionality" because "race" is already captured as a "fill in the blank" "structural event."⁴ Because the practitioners of PRS are generally white academics who either "shop" fixed figures of premodern anti-Blackness or redefine "race" as gender, blood, ethnicity, or (a personal favorite) "humoral" conditions, these individuals rarely dissect the white academic subjectivity they occupy—a position that serves as an uncontested normativity. In the end, PRS leaves in place whiteness in whatever form it appears (male, female, English, Catholic, humoral) while simultaneously claiming to illuminate the importance of racial taxonomies to premodern cultures. In these scholarly narratives, both academic and historical, Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian bodies become marginalized once again.

In my opinion, PRS is fundamentally written by and for white academics. Increasingly, scholars whose publication history shows no attention to "race" have suddenly become experts. While the focus on race is not a problem, what is troubling is the representation of this body of work as innovative or groundbreaking when, in fact, it is derivative. PRS assumes no foundational work on the study of race exists before it comes into play. If these scholars recognize the pre-existence of a cohort of Black, Brown, and Indigenous scholars working on the subject since the 1980s, this preexistence is often relegated to a footnote surrounded by whiteness. Or worse, this body of scholarship is entirely ignored. What is left in place is a metanarrative that obliges academia's insistence on the sanctity of territoriality, periodization, genres, and a conceptualization of premodern individualism defined in terms of whiteness. In effect, this "logic of elimination" results in an affirmation of white supremacist thinking.

Premodern Race Studies (aka Intellectual Settler Colonialism)

Of course, the irony is that this logic accords with the ideologies of white supremacy and its insistence on what Lehua Yim described to me in conversation as the “arrogance of assumption” embedded in the inclusive “we.” This “we” envisions itself acting inclusively, engaged in the political work of furthering PRS by structuring race as an event without actually confronting the presence of the non-white body. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in Harvard University’s Edx description for its online course “Shakespeare’s *Othello*: The Moor”: “In this course, we’ll read William Shakespeare’s *Othello* and discuss the play from a variety of perspectives. The goal of the course is not to cover everything that has been written on *Othello*. Rather, it is to find a single point of entry to help us think about the play as a whole. Our entry point is storytelling From lectures filmed on-location in Venice, London, and Stratford-upon-Avon to conversations with artists, academics, and librarians at Harvard, students will have unprecedented access to a range of resources for ‘unlocking’ Shakespeare’s classic play.”⁵ This online course is evocative of a white settler-colonialist move in the way it creates not a curated understanding of the implications of premodern discourses of race, anti-Blackness, or racial construction but a vision of white subjectivity. Through its “logic of elimination,” this course decenters the theoretical, historical, and analytical work done by PCRS scholars to unpack the racism at the heart of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In effect, by focusing on the play as a matter of “storytelling” and framing it as a filmic piece, the film’s professorial guide, Stephen Greenblatt, ensures that the spectatorial gaze is always white-centered. Othello’s Black sovereignty becomes mediated through a white filter so that his enslavement is processed as a colonizing event: rinse and repeat, again and again.

What Greenblatt’s presence and the course itself underscore is the problematic myopia that informs traditional engagements with premodern race—a failure to grasp a connective tissue between a resurgence of societal white supremacy and academic readings that envision race as a fluid trope capable of marking color, religion, ethnicity, gender, class or simply difference. Surprisingly, none of the proponents of race as a shifting trope recognize the troubling anti-Blackness and anti-Indigenous erasures their work does. Or perhaps they do.

To Protect and Serve: Periodization, Race, and Academic Gatekeeping

The phrase “To Protect and Serve” originally emerged in 1955. As part of its public relations campaign, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) emblazoned the phrase on its vehicles, its letterhead, and its badges. While seemingly innocuous, the words proved to be contradictory over the ensuing decades. In 1965, the LAPD (and the National Guard) rolled into Watts “to protect and serve” Los Angeles in the face of Black anger over policing and racial injustice. In 1992 the LAPD rode in “to protect and serve” during an uprising that followed the police beating of Rodney King. For many communities, the idealization of police as protectors and servants has never been a reality, which is why we’re now witnessing national and international uprisings in response to the problematic ideology of “to protect and serve.” It may appear odd to suggest an analogy between a police state and the Ivory Tower, but, as I hope to illustrate, the impulse behind the phrase “to protect and serve” is very much evident in the academy. The difference: the choice of weapons. In what follows, I want to consider what academic gatekeeping means to the Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and marginalized voices at the forefront of premodern critical race studies.

In an open letter published in the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies’ *The Sundial*, “It’s Time to End the Publishing Gatekeeping!,” the RaceB4Race Executive Board described the difficulty medievalists of color faced when, as a group, they proposed several sessions on race and antiracism to the International Congress of Medieval Studies (ICMS) in 2018. Their proposal was rejected and, after a public outcry, RaceB4Race, a series of conferences and a networking community, was convened in response to ICMS’s rejection. Board members behind the RaceB4Race initiative received an invitation to submit a cluster of essays to *PMLA*. After review, the submission was rejected. The rationale: the proposal, while addressing “an important topic and . . . nicely framed, . . . would have benefitted from including some opposing perspectives to join in the debate.” The letter writers’ response is worth citing in full:

We were disappointed and confused by this rejection, especially by the suggestion that the range of contributors was “constrained,” given that our contributors’ expertise ranges from the history of medieval studies to slavery in early modern England to 17th-century French court ballets. In what sense could our range possibly read as “constrained”? Perhaps “constrained” in that we did not include some older, more established white men to validate our calls for antiracist methodologies and pedagogies? But even more troubling was the suggestion that the editors were expecting and imagining “opposing perspectives” to an antiracist

collection. What kind of “opposing perspectives” were imagined exactly? The cluster’s intervention pointed towards an entirely new direction for premodern studies, and its push for a radical transformation of the field was dismissed with a one-liner that hinged on ellipses and illogic. This second rejection felt eerily similar to the first by the International Congress of Medieval Studies.⁶

To argue for “opposing perspectives” or “rigorous debate” is a well-honed weapon designed to police BIPOC voices and careers and “to protect and serve” a privileged segment of the academy. My academic moments with this form of policing are not numerous, but they remain part of my psyche: the times when I was told (encouraged) to temper my analysis, to mute my anger, to acknowledge the important “white voices” in the field, to not criticize “white literary scholars” who erased the genealogy of non-white scholars who initiated the critical study of race in premodern studies. As many BIPOC researchers/scholars/faculty can attest, these moments come as parts of a complex academic gatekeeping system, including but not exclusive to publications. This system is far more insidious when it comes to employment and retention.

The gag order that is anonymity (peer reviews for essays, anonymous letters for tenure and promotion reviews, and the silence that often follows hiring decisions) has long served to protect not a system of fairness but a code of silencing and abuse within the academy. With the advent of social media, especially Twitter, the code has begun to unravel. During the summer of 2020, a Twitter hashtag, #BlackintheIvory, surfaced to document the experiences of Black faculty, students, and staff in academia. As a Black academic and a senior Shakespearean, I found the accounts painfully familiar and at times difficult to read. Particularly egregious was the degree of anti-Black behavior by non-Black IPOC academics. When a senior South Asian professor chooses to berate a senior Black American professor in public for the “race work” the Black woman does, it is obvious that academic privilege and anti-Blackness are at work. On a micro level, the critique has much more in common with white supremacist thought than postcolonial politics. Coupled with the ubiquitous academic Karens and Beckys who abandon allyship when their privilege is threatened, this type of policing of BIPOC faculty and academic fields becomes commonplace and not always restricted to early career scholars.

A sense of the need for political solidarity has probably led many to ignore the senior BIPOC and “white allies” who engage in “to protect and serve” acts of microaggression in the academy, and especially in premodern studies. We turn a blind eye to the non-Black faculty who quietly drive Black graduate students from their departments. We overlook the impact of the star system on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and

Asian scholars whose rise to the top is mercurial and often at the expense of another marginalized person. While some forms of “to protect and serve” come at the microlevel, more often they are openly visible and still not challenged. We need to ask ourselves: are we invested in protecting our professional cache if we become de facto allies to white supremacy through our anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Brown, anti-Asian micro and macroaggressions?

In addition, we need to consider whether we have lost sight of what it means to be marginalized, contained, denigrated, or niched for the work that made our careers. Have we done enough to protect BIPOC early career researchers and independent scholars from pernicious attacks or retaliation not just by white academics but by our BIPOC colleagues? Isn't it time for senior BIPOC scholars to “protect and serve” the BIPOC and other marginalized scholars whose decision to pursue an academic career is often a direct result of our visible presence? Have we taken a stand against the protective badge of anonymity, long a tool of academic white supremacy, not just in terms of publication but also in employment decisions (hiring, tenuring, and promotion)? Do we recognize that our silence implicates us as well in the policing of the academy?

The adage “Not all skinfolk are kinfolk” is an evergreen truth, and we need to remember that anti-Blackness and other forms of racism can and do appear in unexpected corners. It is also important to remember that allyship does not wear an “I support Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color” button. True allyship is a different kind of commitment to protect and serve all levels of a BIPOC's academic career. One of the most important allies to PCRS is and has been Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, whose *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England* (2000) shifted ground at a time when very few white pre and early modernists were engaged in critical race studies. I highlight this issue because, at this juncture in the history of PCRS, senior BIPOC and marginalized academics who consider themselves committed to the field must ask the most important question in their professional lives: who are we here to protect and serve if not the next generation?

A Brief Interlude titled *Desterrado*

Willoughby Plantation, Barbadoes 1649

The young girl sat at the feet of her black nurse, entranced as the woman's aged fingers moved swiftly and certainly through the cane husks, bringing to life a past nearly forgotten. “Tell me once more, Nana. Tell me of the Negress Maria.”

“In the veins of the Negress Maria flowed the blood of kings. Both she and her sister (who was called Phillipa) were taken as young girls, no older than you.

Maria was perhaps fifteen. The Spaniard who stole her kept her as his mistress. Her beauty bewitched an Englishman and it was he who taught her the secrets of love and hate. Francis Drake. El Draco," the old woman spat.

The woman stroked the girl's dark hair. "Drake fathered Francisco, your mother's grandsire, on the Negress Maria then left her to die on an island with no women to care for her. None to bring the babe into the world. They lived, though. Mother and child. Francisco was always a wild seed, not African like his mother but not English like his father. The Spanish call them Mulattos, little mules. He was of that temper. When an English ship came to the island to take on food and water, Francisco persuaded the captain to take him on. Maria's son worked hard for the merciless white man and once the ship returned to England Francisco left the barbaric captain and went in search of El Draco, his father. Alas, 'twas not to be. El Draco was dead and with no mother, no father, nor lands, Francisco was lost, Desterrado."

"Exile," the child mouthed.

"Exile," the old woman repeated. "Drake's child begat a child and that child begat a child, you, and with each generation the Negress Maria's blood grew thinner and Drake's stronger. Francisco knew that those of his blood would wear the whiteness of his father and pass among the English as one of them. Before his death, he made his daughter Elizabeth swear to remember his line. His daughter's daughter was to be called Afra. For the dark earth that nurtured her ancestors. Aphra. To remind her that, despite her whiteness, she was of the land, of Africa, was forever indigenous and mestizaje, forever desterrado."

This fictional account grew out of an archival/textual encounter with a footnote that has become indelibly etched in my memory and inspired a different writing path: romance fiction. In 1577, Francis Drake sailed along the coast of Central America, near Panama, towards Guatulco. On the way, he captured a Spanish vessel bound for Lima. The Spanish ship carried supplies for the colony and a Spanish nobleman, Don Francisco de Zarate. Holding the Don captive for three days, Drake showed de Zarate "much favour"—even going so far as to give the Spaniard "the poop to sleep in."⁷ According to John Drake, the elder Drake's nephew, Francis Drake, delivered the Don safely to Guatulco and, as part of the ransom for the Don's release, Drake "took from Don Francisco a negress named Maria, and the pilot of said ship" (N 31). After replenishing his vessel, Drake "set sail with men of [his] own nation, the said negress Maria, a negro whom they had taken at Païta, and another they took at Guatulco, besides one they had brought with them from England" (N 31, emphasis mine).

From Guatulco, Drake sailed westward, eventually reaching the Indian Ocean. Coming upon the Moluccas islands, Drake "took in a supply of meat and provisions and lightened their ship by reducing their company

to sixty men." From the Moluccas, the ship sailed north until it reached an uninhabited island, where, because of contrary winds, it remained for approximately six weeks. When the ship departed, three people were left behind: "the two negroes and the negress Maria, to found a settlement." In his generosity, the Englishman Drake left the three "rice, seeds and means of making fire" (N 32).

In *Francis Drake: The Lives of a Hero*, John Cummins refers to the incident twice. The first time, Cummins writes, "Drake retained from Zarate's ship a good-looking black girl called Maria, 'which was afterward gotten with child between the captaine and his men pirats, and set on a small iland to take her adventure.'"⁸ Nearly ten pages later, Cummins states, "When they sailed on 12 December they left behind the black woman Maria, now pregnant, and two negroes, 'to start a population.'"⁹ As a biographer, Cummins does not see his purpose to create a revisionist history (i.e., looking at Drake's actions in light of the problematics of English settler colonialism) but to "document" Drake's actions as part of what is often viewed as a heroic and patriotic life. Thus, as Drake's biographer, Cummins does not perceive a need to comment on or explain away an unequivocally reprehensible act that exemplifies English colonialism. In words that seem intended to justify Drake's reprehensible action, Cummins comments only on Maria's looks—"a good looking black girl" (N 31).¹⁰

Though the historian who excavated John Drake's account (Zelia Nuttall) and the biographer of Francis Drake (Cummins) have quite different historical impulses in writing their books, both Nuttall and Cummins generate very similar ideologies in their handling of the Negress Maria situation—the marginality of her subjectivity and the glorification of masculinity. Cummins's work, in particular, reflects this tendency. Drake's exploits and career assume mythic proportions beneath Cummins's pen: "The aim of my book is not only to recount the facts of Drake's rise from battered ignominy to success and wealth; I hope also to examine the nature of his fame and the processes of his diverging roles in myth and legend; a figure who not only singed the King of Spain's beard, but could also warm the anatomy and fire the dreams of decent Spanish colonial women and haunt their menfolk with a draconian terror."¹¹ It is the "legend" Drake, not the man, who becomes preserved in Cummins's biographic account. Drake's commission of adultery and sexual assaults are insignificant in Cummins's worshipful biography compared to his successes against Spain's military might.

Zelia Nuttall's *New Light on Drake*, on the other hand, is reflective of the traditional historian's presumed objectivity; Nuttall approaches the Negress Maria incident with less "machismo" and more dispassion: "It

also appears that the said John Drake said that after leaving the Islands of Crabs, where they left the negress and the negroes . . . they were driven by the wind out of their course" (N98). Despite the "objective" quality of Nuttall's narration, her description is as problematic as Cummins's handling of Drake's abduction and rape of Maria. Nuttall's handling of John Drake's deposition on the surface seems unproblematic as it appears to be only a translation. What strikes me as unusual is the absence of any commentary on the incident with the Negress Maria, not even a footnote to indicate that Maria was pregnant. Nuttall surely must have known this fact because she cites the other texts that document the Negress Maria incident, *The World Encompassed*, and an anonymous account of Drake's voyage. In both texts, the authors make clear that Maria was "with child" or "very great" in her pregnancy when they describe her abandonment.

Contrary to the historical visibility granted Maria by John Drake's deposition and the authors of *The World Encompassed* and the anonymous account of Drake's voyage, both Nuttall and Cummins manage to efface Maria's subjectivity in ways that none of the other texts could achieve. Like the existence so many women of African ancestry taken from their native lands either by force or voluntarily, Maria's is documented with little more than a footnote. What goes untold in all the written accounts of Drake's abduction and subsequent rape of Maria is the prehistory of her separation from her family, community, and homeland. Who was the Negress Maria? Did Maria leave from Africa or from a Spanish or Portuguese port where she had lived most of her life? Was she abducted by the Spanish Don, or did she enter into a relationship with the Spaniard of her own volition? Had she had previous contact with Europeans? What were her languages? Was she a product of miscegenation? Did her beauty draw the attention of first Zarate, then Drake (and thus substantiating Cummins's comments about her looks)? Did she die in childbirth after Drake left her on the island? Did the child survive?

Maria's marginality in Nuttall's and Cummins's narratives is, in my view, directly correlated with their valorization of Drake—the more significant he, the less important she; the more visible he, the more invisible she. Drake's stature within these particular examples of English historiography is untainted by his sexual abuse and ruthless abandonment of a pregnant woman of African ancestry. The Negress Maria was by no means the only woman of African ancestry to have been taken from her homeland, nor was she the first to become (whether by force or choice) the sexual partner of a European. Had chance or bad fortune not brought her in contact with Francis Drake, Maria would not have been part of English history. What makes Maria "history" is that her life was entwined, even if for a brief period, with Francis Drake and recorded in historical accounts. In other words, what stops Maria from

slipping into the nameless void that was the African slave trade, sadly, is also what produces her historical marginality: Francis Drake. Even so, Maria's dark body will forever contaminate the "purity" of Drake's legend; the nobility of his deeds becomes ever so tarnished by Maria. She is the inky marginal notation, the black speck, that historians and biographers cannot hide. As I was recently reminded, the silence of the enslaved and the marginalized does not go unheard.

Desterrado. Exile. Diasporic voices speak and yet are judged by the weight of their marginalia, citations, and historical evidence. This brief interlude is prompted by my curiosity about Behn's racial history, my foray into romance fiction, and my efforts to disrupt early modern race studies' business as usual.

Periodization and Premodern Critical Race Studies, a postscript

It is easy for institutionalized Shakespeare/early modern studies to suddenly declare 2020 the year of Blackness in Early Modern England/Britain. Yet graduate students are still told to avoid "niche" topics like "race" so as not to narrow their marketability. Intellectual policing of publications continues. Erasures continue. And while these backlashes may seem petty, the blind spots that British historians have for the long-standing work of literary scholars (especially those in the US) on early modern Black peoples in Britain is especially infuriating when they suddenly claim archival discoveries. Imtiaz Habib's *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* is the culmination of archival research begun in the late 1990s, while it is not amiss to declare that Hall's *Things of Darkness* had *been there and done that* in 1995.

If histories are reexamined, silenced voices framed so their narratives become visible, if non-Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color scholars are writing books, articles, thought pieces, holding conferences, and so on about the Black presence in early modern England, do origin stories really matter? My answer is, yes, they matter because they counter the erasure of the intellectual labor performed by a generation of Black and Brown renaissance/early modern English literary scholars who set in motion the study of race, of Blackness, of foreignness in sixteenth/seventeenth-century Britain. Yes, origin stories matter because citation is not the same as foregrounding that scholarship.

Except for Habib, who is with his ancestors yet still watching over a field he helped see into the world, the generation of Black and Brown scholars who brought attention to Black lives in early modern history,

literature, and culture are still active in the profession, still producing scholarship. Scholarly genealogies matter for the generation of Black and Brown scholars who initiated PCRS only to have the profession discount or resist their intellectual, political, and academic labor: professional advancement stymied, journal rejections, research funding denied, and institutional isolation. And yet, they persisted. This generation engaged with critical race theory, anti-Blackness, colonialism, the transatlantic enslavement trade, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the capitalist exploitation of human labor in literary and non-literary texts, labor many white scholars avoided or refused to consider because it was seen as ahistorical. This inattentiveness is also a matter of relational engagement with historical archives. Race, in all its permutations, didn't become a "presence" for many scholars of pre and early modern cultures until it became professionally profitable—in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

As I look to the future of PCRS, despite the obstacles thrown in its path by academic gatekeeping, I am encouraged by the academic voices of Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx peoples who insist on decolonizing not just the present moment but also how we speak of the past, not just about the taxonomy of race but about white settler colonialism and its impact on indigeneity. I want to suggest that a crucial component of PCRS has to be greater attention to indigeneity and its implications for our work. The language of white settler colonialism—race, settlers, sovereignty, individualism, and destiny—remains terrain to interrogate, especially in the Americas and Africa. As we speak of the indigenous and the enslaved African's descendants, of their "ancestries" or genealogies, we would do well to bear in mind Kim TallBear's admonition in "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity" that for "indigenous people's 'ancestry' is not simply genetic ancestry evidenced in 'populations' but biological, cultural, and political groupings constituted in dynamic, longstanding relationships with each other and with living landscapes that define their people-specific identities and, more broadly, their indigeneity."¹² Leanne Betasamosake Simpson encourages us to pay attention to the implications of thinking about sovereignty outside the framework of white settler colonialism and what it might mean for our critical engagements with not just the past but the present when we consider what it means to be a sovereign individual on indigenous lands across the globe.¹³

For Maria Lugones, the importance of turning to a "decolonial feminism" that insists on our thinking about "the continuity between diasporic and nondiasporic subjects without ignoring questions of community as well as the continuity of both with people and communities indigenous to the Americas" is also to question the supremacy of "individualism"

as part of a decolonizing theory.¹⁴ Finally, as Patrick Wolfe reminds us, we need to pay attention to the gray areas between settler colonialism and genocide.¹⁵ While not the same, these categories are not mutually exclusive—especially in the Americas. As it has done since its inception, PCRS continues to challenge a view of historiography that is white-centered, heteronormatively defined, and a continuous reaffirmation of white settler colonialism.

The failure to engage in deep intersectional analyses, to recognize generalizations about “women” or “religion” or “ethnicity” that privilege whiteness, and the semantic trap of seeking to pinpoint the exact moment “race became race” all exemplify Wolfe’s notion of a “structural event.” Whether deliberate or unintentional, PRS not only effaces the problem of colorism (black, red, brown, yellow, white) but upholds the centrality of white supremacy to premodern configurations of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity as fundamental to the capitalist mode of production in the age of settler colonialism. From its inception, PCRS labored against two forms of resistance—institutional or disciplinary gatekeeping and dilution through what can only be viewed as “intellectual settler colonialism.”

In my research and publications, critical race theory and Black feminist intersectionality inform the way I read early modern English literary texts, an analysis that insists upon both an oppositional and an insider definitional gaze. In other words, when I examine the premodern/early modern constructions of race as they manifest as white supremacy, that analysis is performed not just by me as a scholar of historiographies (literary, cultural, and economic). Rather, my analysis is mediated by my subjectivity, and this is crucial, as a US Black woman academic. What this means is that I don’t divorce who I am from what I study. I am a product of the racial ideologies that began even before the enslavement of African peoples. My ancestors (African, white, and possibly indigenous) were further defined as racial beings by white settler colonialism in ways that mark how I see the world. My use of PCRS is strategic, intersectional, and political. It recognizes the capacity of the analytical gaze to define the premodern as a multiethnic system of competing sovereignties. PCRS not only insists on the “presence” of Black and Indigenous bodies that early modern white supremacy considered disposable, but also demands we focus on the sovereignty stripped from those bodies by settler colonialism.

What PCRS resists is the anthropological move of making Blackness and Indigeneity forms of academic ecotourism, a move very present in PRS. As an intellectual, political, and public deterritorialization of white supremacy’s capacious erasure of the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples

(whether in the Americas, the Pacific Islands, or the African continent), PCRS is the work of public humanists/scholars who recognize that the kinetic importance of their analyses cannot be reduced to a trope. Nor is the impact of critical race theory to be found by strolling through Venice or London, privileging a discourse of religion without attention to the impact of religion on a non-white body. Similarly, when anti-Blackness serves as the only narrative in premodern race studies (*Othello*), it refracts the critical lens from the anti-Indigenous strategies woven into white settler colonialism's anti-Blackness discourse.

When we look at anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness as intersecting acts, we recognize that white settler colonialism happens not just on the body but also through the mind. Enslaved Indigenous peoples removed from the continent of Africa were the first to undergo the ideological process of colonization. White settler colonialism stripped the enslaved of their right to sovereignty as an experiment for future use. This experiment involved the destruction of peoples' relationship to their land, their communities, and their very sovereignty. Indigenous Africans were removed from their lands, enslaved, and transported to the Americas. These individuals were deprived of land sovereignty and denied access to the land except as laborers. This initial Indigenous removal served white supremacy well once the "settling of the Americas" got underway.

By elevating the idea of individuality, a fundamental tenet of capitalism, and stripping Indigenous peoples of their relationship to the means of production, most importantly land, white settler colonialism ensured that not only descendants of the enslaved but all indigenous peoples remain locked in a capitalist experiment. It seems important to recognize the pre-enslavement indigeneity of African peoples removed from their lands. Too often, in our discussion of the enslavement of Africans and the legacy their descendants currently face, academics deploy the "master's tool" of white supremacy. To think of those enslaved between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries solely in terms of anti-Black rhetoric elides their more complex sovereignty as Indigenous peoples.

This type of awareness is what informs PCRS. It is an awareness that refuses the individualistic models that come with periodization as tools of analysis. To commit to PCRS is to recognize we cannot just engage the problem of anti-Blackness. We must also examine the anti-Indigeneity that goes hand in hand with anti-Blackness. It is not enough to investigate the role of gender within race-making. We must begin to look at the complications sexuality imposes on gender models and then further complicate the ways we engage "race." PCRS insists that to leave white subjectivity uncontested, unexamined, is to feed white supremacy. Finally, PCRS takes seriously Audre Lorde's injunction that

white settler colonialism's ideological tools cannot be the ones to create a decolonizing resistance. An insistence on the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and class is the only way to decolonize the academy's gatekeeping role in the furtherance of white supremacy. PCRS begins with a rejection of the periodization of the past and its implication for the study of race. PCRS's refusal to employ "medieval" or "renaissance" as markers signals a step away from a post-Enlightenment tendency to carve time, place, and human lives into discrete boxes. In essence, PCRS rejects gatekeeping in all its forms.

What PCRS marks is an insistence on intersectionality in scholarly analyses of the past. By decolonizing the past in terms of antiracist pedagogy and critical analyses, PCRS scholars expose the complex intersecting economic, gender, and somatic taxonomies that inform the policing of non-white subjectivity and sovereignty. Resistance to premodern critical race studies, whether in the policing of academic conference programming or in publications, or the efforts to sanitize (make white) the genealogy of PCRS, did not arise by happenstance. It takes a great deal of effort to "protect and serve" academic white privilege.

Epilogue: no estoy desterrado, or citational genealogies

In 2011 I gave a plenary talk at the Shakespeare Association of America's annual conference that hinted at the policing of the academy. The paper was supposed to be my "swan song" to the academic world, and it had no works cited page. As a Black woman with no intentions of becoming a university professor, my relationship with my university home and its insidious white deployment of "to protect and serve" had finally taken a toll. I was of an age to retire "early," even though an additional year would have brought financial benefits. The mental health costs were not worth the expenditure of time. I'm still of two minds on the academy, and once again I want to offer no works-cited page here. What I want to offer is a citational epilogue or genealogy. I will leave it to the reader to decide which best reflects the spirit of this essay.

Citational genealogy is an acknowledgment of the complex ways PCRS came into being: in essence, the intellectual, analytical, and archival mediations that had to take place for *race* to become a lens through which we gaze at premodern cultures. Citational genealogy is not a footnote or endnote. It is the awareness that mediations such as Shelley Haley's "Be Not Afraid of the Dark: Critical Race Theory and Classical Studies," or Geraldine Heng's *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, or Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, or Irene

Silverblatt's *Modern Inquisitions*, or Hall's *Things of Darkness*, or Joyce Green MacDonald's *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts*, or Ayanna Thompson's *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*, or Arthur Little's *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* laid not just the groundwork but the foundation for the study of race in pre and early modern cultures.¹⁶

These works not only questioned the value of periodization; they also interrogated academic disciplinary boundaries that insisted race was a post-Enlightenment matter. These studies insisted on the legitimacy of critical race studies as a methodological mode of inquiry into the past. PCRS is also intersectional. It is impossible for me to write about early modern racial taxonomies without attending to gender, sexuality, and class. Issues of performance, literariness, cultural interactions, and Indigenous resistance, whether in Africa, Asia, or the Americas, make intersectionality a necessity, not an afterthought.

Until the 2019 RaceB4Race invitation, I avoided academic events (I do owe Farah Karim-Cooper an in-person talk at some point) and focused on the mode of writing that, ironically, was an underlying reason for my decision to pursue an academic career in the first place: romance fiction. What I hadn't imagined was the role critical race studies would come to play in this arena as well. What also has become quite clear is that PCRS isn't quite ready to release me. As I am crafting these words, I see the intellectual and personal genealogies embedded in the work I have produced during my academic career. Some are cornerstones of PCRS: Kim Hall, Arthur Little, Ayanna Thompson, Joyce Green Macdonald, Francesca Royster, Peter Erickson, Eldred Jones, Peter Fryer, Anthony Barthelemy, Jennifer Morgan, and Imtiaz Habib. Others are non-white postcolonialist and Marxist voices such as Stuart Hall, C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, and Edward Said.

Emerging Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian voices in PCRS inspire me: Lehua Yim, Dennis Britton, Justin Shaw, Patricia Akhimie, Ambereen Dadabhoy, Brandi Adams, Mira Kafantaris, Mary Rambaran-Olm, Ruben Espinosa, Carissa Harris, Sierra Lomuto, Noémie Ndiaye, Kyle Grady, Farah Karim-Cooper, David Sterling Brown, and Cord J. Whitaker, to name a few. If I've left anyone off, it's because I am just coming to know the next generation. Please forgive the oversight.

The original (OG) Black Shakespeareans who gave/give me sustenance and continually remind me of the importance of what we do: Ayanna Thompson, Arthur Little, Kim Hall, Joyce Green MacDonald, and Francesca Royster.

The ancestor who made it possible for Margo Hendricks to become the Black woman writing this thought piece was Zeola Culpepper Jones.

The daughter of enslaved peoples, Zeola Culpepper Jones taught me the importance of family, genealogy, and intellectual integrity.

Finally, I am honored to be part of a group of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and allied white scholars who radically changed and are changing the way we contend with the interconnections between capitalism, colonialism, and race, and “who tells the story.” The story of the Negress Maria hasn’t disappeared because of the academic Black women whose intellectual work focuses on early modern studies. Maria’s history remains even when her African name has been erased. We tell the story of the enslaved, the Indigenous, and the marginalized whose voices have been silenced by white supremacy and settler colonialism. This telling, in my view, is the citational genealogy I choose to deploy. While the study of premodern race may become fashionable terrain for a type of intellectual settler colonialism, it is impossible to erase the foundation constructed and sustained by Black, Brown, Latinx, and Asian scholars’ refusal to accept the limitations and silences periodization imposes on intellectual inquiry. Nor do we apologize when this refusal offends. We will be heard.

This is citational genealogy. This is Premodern Critical Race Studies.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

NOTES

1 Margo Hendricks, “‘Obscured by dreams’: Race, Empire, and Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1996): 60

2 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 3 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987, 1991, and 2006); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); and Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1994).

3 bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992), 116.

4 See Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Continuum, 1999).

5 Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare’s Othello: The Moor,” Harvard University Online Courses, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/shakespeares-othello-moor?delta=2>.

6 RaceB4Race Executive Board, “It’s Time to End the Publishing Gatekeeping!” *The Sundial*, June 11, 2020, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmrs/its-time-to-end-the-publishing-gatekeeping-75207525f587>.

7 Zelia Nuttall, ed. and trans., *New Light on Drake: A Collection of Documents Relating to His Voyage of Circumnavigations, 1577–1580* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), 31 (hereafter cited as *N*).

8 John Cummins, *Francis Drake: The Lives of a Hero* (New York: St. Martins, 1997), 112.

9 Cummins, *Francis Drake*, 121.

- 10 Cummins, *Francis Drake*, 111.
- 11 Cummins, *Francis Drake*, 4.
- 12 Kim TallBear, "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity," in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 2015), 131.
- 13 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "The Place Where We All Live and Work Together: A Gendered Analysis of 'Sovereignty,'" in *Native Studies Keywords*, 23.
- 14 María Lugones, "Musing: Reading the Nondiasporic from within Diasporas," *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 20.
- 15 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.
- 16 Shelley Haley, "Be Not Afraid of the Dark: Critical Race Theory and Classical Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 27–50; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 2018); Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013); and Arthur Little, *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000).