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## **Race and Racism: The Afterlives of Slavery and Colonialism**

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In thinking about race and racism as a scholarly subject in the U. S. academy as well as in France and the Francophone world, one is always confronted with the interesting dilemma of an evolving French frankness on the question of racism in the public, political, and academic sphere but the elision of race as a practical quantifier of citizens. One can have the Taubira Law, a memorial to slavery, a reburial of Alexandre Dumas in the Panthéon because of once unacknowledged nineteenth-century French racism papered over as professional jealousy and even as *bonhomie* when dispensed by some of his closest associates. However, Frenchness as the signal glue in the republic is especially complicated as it renders socio-economic and political marginalization—as a consequence of racial difference—invisible. Whereas in the United States, one continuously articulates race as the problem, particularly in public discourse, when what is really operating on the ground and in institutions that enlivened groups such as Black Lives Matter is racism. But that word is discomfiting and the accusation stings in the US where public memory, despite its gnarled history, clings to an idea of itself as a freedom and equality-exhorting democracy that overcame the stain of slavery such that 1) we don't need to talk about it and 2) there are no retrograde afterlives of that peculiar institution. At the same time, slavery seems now to be ubiquitous in public culture—on television (*Underground*, *The Book of Negroes*, the *Roots* reboot, and PBS's *Finding Your Roots*), film (*Django Unchained*, *12 Years a Slave*), in literature (*Book of Night Women*, *The House Girl*, *Homegoing*, *Freeman*), and in museums and memorials (Whitney Plantation, The Legacy Museum, National Museum of African American History and Culture, the excavation and marketing of the newly discovered Sally Hemmings bedroom at Monticello).

As a scholar who moves back and forth between African American and Diaspora Studies and French Studies, both the American and French stances on race and racism represent a sort of bad faith; however, I prefer to think of them, in borrowing a term from the brilliant work of Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, as clever positions on the continuum of *racecraft*. For my own research and teaching endeavors, I've been especially consumed with racecraft in these two fields of study. While a U.S.-focused intellectual project, the Fields sisters' *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* has provided a framework for reorienting my approach to the idea of race and the practices of racism linked to the afterlives of slavery and colonialism. While my recent work has moved into the interwar period of the twentieth century, I have found myself returning to the Age of Revolutions as well as the nineteenth century, particularly to Alexandre Dumas, his life, as well as his engagement with the Age of Revolutions on questions of race, freedom, and slavery—and

not simply in his rather butterfingered treatment of these issues in the 1843 novel, *Georges*. I've also found philosopher Naomi Zack's dismantling of the troubling and all-encompassing throwaway term "white privilege" particularly useful in unpacking discussions about everyday contemporary structural/systemic racism and white identity in both the US and French contexts.

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