

## CHAPTER 3

# MULTICULTURALIST WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE SUBSTRUCTURE OF THE BODY

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### INTRODUCTION: FROM “RACE” TO WHITE SUPREMACY

The dreadful genius of the “postracial”/“postracist” moment lies in the creative disruption of white bodily monopoly in the operative sites of US nation-building (racial empire) from the grass roots to the White House. The ascendancy of postapartheid and “postcivil rights”<sup>1</sup> multiculturalisms marks the obsolescence of “classical” white supremacy as a model of oppression and socially ordering violence based *primarily* or even *predominantly* on the (relatively) exclusive vesting of hegemonic institutional power in the collective white social body. Postracial, postracist Americanism—accumulating momentum as the *still racial* nationalist narrative of the twenty-first-century United States—is far worse than a naïve or misinformed mythification of the civil rights dream: it is the signaling of a sophisticated, flexible, and “diverse” (multiculturalist) white supremacy as the heartbeat of the US national form.

The signature racial institutional shifts of the post-civil rights period have been marked by visible changes—compulsory and voluntary—in the comportment, culture, and workforce of white supremacist institutions: selective elements of police and military forces, global corporations, and major research universities are diversely colored, while their marching orders continue to mobilize the familiar labors of death- and misery-making (arrest and justifiable homicide, fatal peacekeeping, overfunded weapons research,

etc.). Thus, while the *phenotype* of white supremacy has changed—a reordering (and partial “reprofilng”) of bodies altogether necessary for its technologies of institutional power to remain viable under changed historical conditions—its internal coherence *as a logic of social formation* has been sustained, redeemed, and enhanced.

The allegedly postracial, postracist United States is a laboratory for the invention and refinement of global white supremacy, a production of institutionalized dominance and violence that inspires, hails, authorizes, and empowers its historical objects of vulnerability and dehumanization. As the systemic fatalities of “race” remain indelibly imprinted on the constituting social and cultural structures of state, nation, community, and public, the *dislocation* of fatal agency from the exclusive domain of the white body compels a transformation of activist and scholarly praxis. How are we to conceptualize, confront, oppose, creatively disrupt, and/or transform this multiculturalist renaissance of a global white supremacist form? How does the recasting and redistribution of racial/racist “bodies” within the *desegregated* geographies of white supremacy compel a reframing of antiracist, abolitionist, antigenocide, decolonizing, and radical liberationist work?

It is by now widely acknowledged that a critical scholarship of “the body” must substantively address “race” as a basic category of analysis, conceptualization, and theorization. Yet to address race and the body as such, that is, to emphasize how bodies (human, nonhuman, “virtual,” and otherwise) are formed through the discursive regimes of racialization across time and place, is to already provoke sweeping historical-political questions about how power, violence, and domination *work on and through* particular kinds of (racial) bodies.

In this chapter, I want to highlight the urgency of embracing and engaging an emergent “turn” in critical interdisciplinary approaches to the body, a methodological and theoretical move that explicitly departs from *descriptive* approaches to race (which tend to rely on race as a taken-for-granted category of analysis and/or comparison) and instead focuses centrally on what might be termed the *racial determinations* of the historical-social form. Elaborating and stretching Cedric Robinson’s durable conception of “racial capitalism,”<sup>2</sup> I am interested in an analytical schema that strategically privileges the technologies and socially constituting logics of power that constitute “race” as the organizing discursive structure of a social determination—white supremacy—that is relatively symbiotic with (*and not derivative of*) the economic substructure (and the “mode of production” generally).<sup>3</sup> This conceptualization suggests the following: (1) The contemporary moment of “multiculturalist white supremacy” is a *historically specific social formation* of a white supremacist substructure that is several centuries in the making and not the harbinger of white supremacy’s (or race and racisms’) extinction;