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REVIEW ESSAY

Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), ISBN: 978-0253352965

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Twin Dangers

Ladelle McWhorter introduces her book, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*, with an account of her experiences during the days between the attack on and the death of Matthew Shepard. On sabbatical near Pennsylvania State University in October of 1998, McWhorter describes following these events as they were covered by the media and discussed on a Penn State University LGBT listserv. A day and a half after Shepard's death, McWhorter attended a candlelight vigil for Shepard organized by Penn State University students. It was raining, only thirty people were present, their voices could scarcely be heard over the sounds of traffic, and the event risked being more disheartening than consoling. An attempt was made to salvage the vigil through song, and someone suggested singing "We Shall Overcome," but none of the students knew the words. McWhorter realized that she was the only person present who could lead the group in a song that might bring a sense of hope and closure to the otherwise depressing gathering. However, as she describes, she was wary of calling "upon the memory and power of African American movements for justice and freedom in order to further the rights and interests, or at least comfort the fearful souls of non-heterosexual people."(10) She writes,

> it was important for Matthew Shepard to remain Matthew Shepard and Emmett Till to remain Emmett Till, two separate individuals whose living and dying are different events in human history. I believed it was important to remember the differences between black and queer struggles, subcultures, and experiences of oppression. (9)

McWhorter recalls the memory of a gay African American friend who insisted that the struggles of African Americans and queer people against racism and heterosexism were "not the same." (9) And so, for all these reasons, McWhorter did not sing and the

> gathering disintegrated without closure. Each one of us wandered away, carrying with us, not a sense that despite the violence and injustice all around us life can go on and love and respect do still exist – which is, I suppose, what the candlelight shining in the darkness at such vigils is intended to instil in us – but rather with that sense of futility and hopelessness that drizzle and senseless death inspire. (5)

Despite her decision to not sing, McWhorter goes on in her Introduction to discuss not only the danger of Sameness that prompted her decision – the danger of homogenizing or identifying oppressions such as racism and heterosexism, of assimilating or analogizing the violent deaths of Shepard and Till – but also the "twin danger" of Difference. The pitfalls of privileging Difference are "isolation, impotence, and collapse." (10) As McWhorter elaborates, "If we maintain radical distinctions between political events, we may fail to see important overarching patterns and as a result miss opportunities to form and consolidate alliances that might counter the networks of power that oppress so many of us." (10-11)

Although there are thus risks involved in emphasizing either Sameness or Difference, McWhorter notes that she had always been more worried by the dangers of Sameness. She attributes this intuition to her attraction to Foucault. The genealogical method is concerned with revealing discontinuities between, for instance, how sex, madness, and crime were experienced in diverse historical periods, undermining histories that impose homogeneity on the past. Pointing out disparities in the past kindles hope for a different future and is thus an emancipatory political task. McWhorter summarizes these points by saying that Foucault is a "splitter" and not a "lumper" like Hegel or Plato.

Despite her Foucaultian aversion to lumping, however, McWhorter writes that in the wake of that candlelight vigil and the more general political climate of the late 1990s in which allegiances between civil rights movements were being disavowed, she came to worry about that other danger, the danger of too much splitting. She wonders "whether, despite all the differences in experience and effect, it might not be the case that somehow these things are joined together, part of the same matrix of power, employing the same means, serving the same ends, shaping the same lives." (11) She notes, "It is that other danger and that other set of possibilities that have moved me to write this book, despite the risks such an enquiry inevitably runs." (11)

The dangers of Difference are practical but also factual, for, as McWhorter goes on to argue in her Introduction, there are *real* similarities between the deaths of Shepard and Till, and most significant of these is that in both cases young men were punished for their sexual deviance: one for his homosexuality in a heterosexist society, the other for his insistence that he could and did sleep with white women in a racist society that forbade miscegenation. Shepard was sexually transgressive because he was gay, while Till was sexually transgressive because he claimed to have a white girlfriend, and whistled at a white woman. Both hate crimes involved the regulation of sexuality and the punishment of individuals who rejected oppressive sexual norms. The racist hate crime that was the murder of Emmett Till was also a sexual hate crime and an instance of sexual oppression, for Till was punished not so much for being black, but for being a black men who did or would sleep with white women and who refused to deny this in the face of white violence.

While the hypersexualization of African Americans and the sexual oppression that is inseparable from the history of racial oppression in the U.S. context is well-known, and has

been described by authors such as Naomi Zack as "the American sexualization of race,"[1] less apparent in the Till-Shepard comparison and more generally are the ways in which sexual oppression is racialized the U.S. context. McWhorter's argument will go both ways, however: not only is race in the U.S. thoroughly sexualized, but, as shall be explained below, sexual oppression in the U.S. is also racist. This thesis, raised in the Introduction and demonstrated historically in the following chapters, will make McWhorter return to the question of whether it is permissible to "ever draw on the practical, symbolic, rhetorical, emotional, and moral resources of the black civil rights movement in efforts to foster queer community, protest anti-queer violence and discrimination, and demand respect for the rights and sensibilities of non-heterosexual and gender-transgressive people." (17) If racism and sexual oppression are inseparable, why must we be so careful not to invoke the antiracist movement in the anti-heterosexism movement?

This question is one faced by other liberation movements. For instance, it is a common but contested move for animal liberationists to compare speciesism to racism and sexism. Sometimes this is done in the form of analogies: factory farms are like Nazi concentration camps; animal slavery is like African American slavery; the "meat market" in women is like the meat market in animal flesh. Sometimes, however, the comparisons are more complex, and the various forms of oppression are not only said to be logically or practically similar, but to have a shared history and to mutually reinforce each other. These comparisons of speciesism to racism and sexism have been taken up by some critical race theorists and feminists (Carol Adams, Josephine Donavan, Charles Patterson, Marjorie Spiegel and Isaac B. Singer to name a few), but, more often, give rise to outrage. When People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) launched a campaign comparing human and nonhuman animal slavery, juxtaposing images of the transportation, branding, and auctioning of African human bodies and nonhuman animal bodies, this outrage was extreme. Similar anger arose when PETA compared the disappearance of prostitutes in Vancouver to a pig farm where they were murdered to the disappearance of pigs at that pig farm where they were also murdered. And so the question that worries McWhorter might be generalized: can one *ever* draw on the resources of one liberation movement for the purposes of another?

However pressing this question may be to us now, McWhorter shows that it is a relatively recent question, at least with respect to the LGBT movement. Up until the late 1990s, she writes, "gay men and lesbians had understood their movements as a more or less natural extension of the civil rights movements of the mid-twentieth century, and veterans of the black civil rights movement seldom challenged that belief." (17) McWhorter charts the historical shift from comparisons between the black and gay civil rights movements being common, with straight African Americans being generally less homophobic than straight white Americans, to the situation in the late 1990s – when she chose not to sing "We Shall Overcome" – and the present, in which it is to walk into a "minefield" to invoke the black civil rights movement in support of LGBT rights (or of nonhuman animal rights for that matter).

[1] Naomi Zack, "The American Sexualization of Race," in Naomi Zack (ed.), *Race/Sex: Their Sameness, Difference and Interplay* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 145-156.

"Racism Against the Abnormal"

This state of affairs brings McWhorter to discuss Foucault's potentially inflammatory statement, in the final pages of *Abnormal*, that

> The racism that psychiatry gave birth to is racism against the abnormal, against individuals who as carriers of a condition, stigmata, or any defect whatsoever, may more or less randomly transmit to their heirs the unpredictable consequences of the evil, or rather of the non-normal, that they carry within them. It is a racism, therefore, whose function is not so much the prejudice or defense of one group against another as the detection of all those within a group who may be the carriers of a danger to it. It is an internal racism that permits the screening of every individual within a given society.[2]

Although McWhorter's Foucaultian intuition had been that it is better to err on the side of splitting than lumping, in the last lecture of *Abnormal* she finds Foucault himself lumping all discrimination against abnormal individuals together under the word "racism." Worse, Foucault is not only *analogizing* various oppressions to racism, but *calling* them racism. Discrimination against abnormal people of various kinds is not just *like* racism, it *is* racism – albeit of a new variety. As McWhorter writes,

> Foucault makes a choice very different from the one I made on the night after Matthew Shepard's death. He does not hesitate to draw on the history of oppression of nonwhite peoples to illuminate the suffering of nonheterosexual (and other "non-normal") people of all colors and ethnicities. And he goes even further. He chooses to *equate* racism and what, for lack of a better word, we usually call "heterosexism" or "homophobia" as well as other bigotries aimed at people considered deviant in many other ways. (32)

McWhorter considers and dismisses two possible interpretations of Foucault's claim that modern racism is "racism against the abnormal." One explanation is that Foucault was overstating what he really meant to say for rhetorical impact, but McWhorter concludes that reckless overstatement was not Foucault's style.

The second explanation is that Foucault's statement is shorthand for saying that in an age of biopolitical normalization, all those who are deemed abnormal are targets of discrimination, including those who are abnormal due to their ethnicity or race. Those who are abnormal in terms of ethnicity or race are thus only one example of a larger phenomenon. Discrimination against epileptics and queers is therefore "racism" in the sense that it is part of the same phenomenon as racism. The problem with this explanation is that if racism is being subsumed under a larger umbrella of oppression against the abnormal, why does "racism" become the privileged term? If race is in fact just one of a cluster of manners in which a person may be deemed abnormal, why does it, rather than heterosexism or ableism, become the label for *all* these forms of discrimination? By this logic, might one not just as well say that "racism is ableism against the abnormal"? Why not make up some new word to serve as the umbrella term for all forms of prejudice against the abnormal rather than picking out one

[2] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France: 1975-1975* (Picador, 2004), 316-7.

example – racism – to do this work? Moreover, why choose "racism" if, in some instances, race may not be an issue at all?

McWhorter will spend the next several chapters providing evidence for a third explanation for Foucault's claim that modern racism is "racism against the abnormal," one that avoids these pitfalls. McWhorter argues that all forms of discrimination against the abnormal are indeed racist, even when the victim may not be from a racially or ethnically marginalized group, since in each case the discrimination is about racial purification or protecting the race. "The race" here refers to the human race, and yet the highest realization of this race (that which needs to be protected) is never doubted to be white (and also able-bodied, heterosexual, etc.). Oppression of abnormal individuals is about race even when the targets are white homosexuals, white people with low IQ scores, poor white people or white epileptics. In each case, as in the case of racism against nonwhites, the discriminatory acts, attitudes and policies aim to protect the future of the human race against potential pollutants, even when this means purging or incapacitating deviant members of the race who happen to be white. This is why McWhorter's argument goes both ways: not only is race sexualized in the U.S., but sexual abnormality has become a matter of (protecting the) race.

The oppression of abnormal people is thus racist, since the objective is to preserve the race against alleged dangers, including dangers internal to the white population (hence Foucault's term "internal racism"). Thus the forensic overkill of Matthew Shepard was racist, just as the forensic overkill of Emmett Till was an act of sexual oppression. While Till was killed because his sexuality threatened racist norms, Shepard was killed because his homosexuality was perceived as a threat to the future of the human race recast in the last part of the twentieth century, McWhorter will argue, as "family values." Racism and sexual oppression are not simply analogous in these examples, and nor are they merely "intersecting" – they are the same thing. "Racial difference," McWhorter writes, "thus was sexual difference." (201) Intersectionist analyses of race, gender, and sexuality are flawed not only because they focus on individuals rather than institutions and discourses (15), but because they do not go far enough in thinking the inseparability of racism and sexual oppression. Hence, while the claim that modern racism is "racism against the abnormal" might initially appear to subsume heterosexism under racism, or to make racism the privileged phenomenon, in fact neither racism nor sexual oppression is being claimed as primary.

McWhorter will demonstrate that oppression of the abnormal in recent U.S. history, as in the European history that Foucault discusses, has been all about racial purification, and so "racism" is in fact an accurate term for Foucault to use, and for us to use on this side of the Atlantic as well; at least, it was not a use of the term that dispenses curiously with race, as McWhorter had first thought. Nevertheless, since we usually use the term "racism" to refer exclusively to discrimination against racial minorities, there is no denying that Foucault is using the term in a novel way when he speaks of "racism against the abnormal." Providing a brief genealogy of the term "racism," McWhorter then argues that if novel usage were grounds for dismissal, we would have to reject all post-1950s uses of the term as well. The word "racism" only dates to 1936, and was coined to refer to a set of false, ignorant, irrational, or unscientific beliefs or to someone who ascribes to these views. Moreover, originally the word "racism" could only be applied to beliefs and to individuals, not to countries, states, or

institutions. Since the 1960s, however, the use of the word "racism" has changed so that we can apply it to countries and institutions like the prison. Since the 1950s we also use the term racism to refer to fantasies, drives, dispositions, personalities, many of which are unconscious. One may not consciously espouse any racist doctrines, on this view, but is racist nonetheless. McWhorter notes that this use has "prompted a lot of anxious soul-searching on the part of conscientious liberal white people who had thought up until that time that they were not racist at all." (39) In an interesting analogy, she observes that the word "racism" used to function like the word "creationism," but now operates more like the word "alcoholism," to refer to something that one might suffer from without realizing it. (39) As with alcoholism, we are encouraged to confess to our racism, as this confession constitutes a first step towards controlling a predisposition that can nevertheless not be eradicated. (40)

This discussion goes to show that Foucault is not the first person to mobilize, adopt, or suggest a new use of the term "racism," and that there is in fact no one correct usage of the word. What we need to do, McWhorter therefore suggests, is not to reject specific usages because they are novel or unfamiliar, but to consider the political usefulness of one use versus another. We should ask ourselves: what are the effects of being able to apply the term "racism" to institutions? What are the political consequences of psychologizing the term? What are the strategic advantages of Foucault's use of the term in his lecture? In the remainder of her book, McWhorter will give compelling reasons for rejecting the psychologizing use of the term "racism," for being able to use the word to describe not only individuals but more importantly institutions and discourses, and for taking up Foucault's novel use of the term in *Abnormal*.

Changing Concepts of Race

McWhorter tells us in her Introduction that she "did not want to write another book about Foucault but to write a Foucaultian analysis, a genealogy of race to place alongside his (and my own) genealogies of sexual normalization." (12) When she originally decided to write a genealogy of race, McWhorter did not yet know about Foucault's 1975 comment on race in *Abnormal*, nor that Foucault had himself genealogized race in his 1976 lecture series, "*Society Must Be Defended*." While the term "rac*ism*" may only have been invented in the second half of the 1930s (to characterize Hitlerism), Foucault's lectures show that the word "race" has a much longer history: he begins his genealogy with seventeenth-century race war discourses in England and France and traces them to Nazi Germany. Like all genealogies, the power of Foucault's genealogy of race is that it shows the contingency of our current ways of thinking about and experiencing a concept. Foucault shows that race initially referred to lineage or culture, not to hierarchically ordered biological types or bodily morphologies. Moreover, he demonstrates that race war discourse was originally a subversive discourse spoken from the margins, uttered in resistance against the powers that be. Highlighting the series of events through which "race" changed over centuries to signify a biological category, and race war discourse was taken up and inverted by those in power, underscores the evitability of our racist present. More forebodingly, however, Foucault's 1976 lectures suggest that the concept of race has come to be crucial to the functioning of biopower since racism is what gives the biopolitical state the authorization to kill. This means that while racism is not inevitable but

came about through a contingent series of power struggles, by now it is thoroughly caught up with the forms of power that characterize our age, and is hence not disembedded through the simple rejection of an ideology. Racism is not so much entrenched in our unconsciousnesses, but in our institutions and discourses.

McWhorter was not dissuaded in her task of writing a genealogy of race when she realized that Foucault had himself written such a genealogy. After briefly summarizing the relevant 1976 lectures, she proceeds with her own genealogy in the following chapters, a genealogy that is both far more extensive than Foucault's and takes us from Europe to the United States. Unlike many Foucault scholars who casually refer to their works as "genealogical" if they include the least historical insight, McWhorter's book is erudite and rooted in years of historical research. One is reminded of Foucault's exasperated statement to Jana Sawicki, that rather than write a commentary on *his* work, she ought to write genealogies of her own.[3] While we need not be beholden to Foucault's own preferences or directives, it is clear that with McWhorter's book we have a rare work of Foucault scholarship of which Foucault himself would approve. If one loves Foucault's genealogies and laments that one will never read a new one, *Racism and Sexual Oppression* is exhilarating to read – it is a bit like discovering another genealogy by Foucault himself, and yet it also charts its own path. McWhorter's book mobilizes Foucault's method and is, as Foucault thought writing should be, transformative of author and reader alike.

Shifting the focus of her genealogy across the Atlantic to what she calls Anglo-America (which, to inhabitants of other parts of the Americas might suggest the inclusion of English-speaking parts of Canada, but which in fact refers exclusively to the United States), McWhorter argues that "the white race was the very first race to be morphologically defined – as distinct from races such as the Saxon and the Norman that were defined by lineage and tradition – and that it came into existence through the course of the eighteenth century in the tobacco colonies of Anglo-America." (63) Slightly earlier: "Nazi Germany's was not the first government to make race a central part of its public policy or its governing strategy. It is entirely possible that the first government to do so was not that of a nation-state at all but that of a colony, England's Virginia Colony in the early eighteenth century, and that the first nation to do so was the United States of America in 1787." (62) These are suggestions not just about the U.S. beating European countries to the chase but to being the first *in the world* to invent a race (morphologically-defined) and to make race central to public policy. These claims, while entirely plausible, have a whiff of American exceptionalism about them, even though it is an unfortunate exceptionalism that is at stake. It might have been enough for McWhorter to say that in the context of the U.S. history that is her focus, the white race was the first to be morphologically defined, and that compared to the Western European countries that Foucault discusses, the U.S. was quicker to make race a part of public policy. In this way McWhorter might have steered clear of more categorical claims that, to verify, would seem to require that we know the histories of racism of every country on the globe – a project that is clearly beyond

[3] Jana Sawicki discusses this incident in the Introduction to her book, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

the scope of McWhorter's (or perhaps any) book.[4] Whether or not we can be certain that the U.S. was first in the world in its pioneering transmutations of race war discourse and racial policies, McWhorter is convincing that many of the events that Foucault dates later in his European history of race occurred earlier in the North American context: for instance, the shift in understanding race as lineage to a morphological conception of race is situated in the nineteenth century in Europe by Foucault, but McWhorter provides evidence that it occurred in the eighteenth century in colonies such as Virginia.

In addition to backdating Foucault's genealogy of racism, and situating it within the context of colonial North America, McWhorter also introduces another correction to Foucault's work. In "*Society must be defended*," Foucault refers to the transformation of racial discourse from *la lutte des races* in the seventeenth century to the biological racism of the nineteenth century as a "transcription."[5] Although he mentions some of the transition moments between these two paradigms, Foucault does not adequately thematize them and make them a direct object of study. McWhorter corrects this by adding an additional "transcription." She notes that between the era of *la lutte des races* and biological racism came a long period in which racism was understood primarily in terms of physical morphology. She insists on thinking of "morphological race" as distinct from either the notion of race-as-heritage that prevailed in the seventeenth century, or the notions of race-as-physiology that prevailed in the nineteenth. This is partially a function of geographical focus — "things occurred somewhat differently in the United States than they did in Europe" — but it also serves an analytic purpose. By dividing the discussion of transcription into two phases, McWhorter "makes clearer the ways in which the concept of the abnormal comes into play in racial discourses." (96)

In the era of *la lutte des races*, "race" refers to groups such as the Franks and Gauls. "Races" are bound together by custom, habit, language, etc., and they are nearly innumerable. Once race comes to be understood in terms of "bare physicality," two new questions emerge: how many races are there? And, what causes these morphological differences? McWhorter takes us through some of the debates around the first question (thinkers of this era place the number of races at between four and twenty-two), but it is now not possible to have an *infinite* number of races. The answer to the second question is also contested, but is largely explained in terms of environmental conditions. Hence we have debates on whether Native Americans could even survive if transported to Europe.

In the final transcription, to physiological or biological race, there are two new developments. First, race is properly only spoken of in the singular. There are not numerous "races." The real "race" under investigation is the *human* race (i.e., the human species). Once race is unified in this way, variation is understood as deviation from the norm. As McWhorter makes clear, scientific racism "is a racism preoccupied not with attacking members of another race but with protecting the boundaries of *the* race, the only race that matters, the human race embodied in its highest representatives." (140) Although people continue to speak of African-Americans or Native Americans as 'races,' they really mean that these people are deviant variants, or arrested forms of the highest realization of the human race.

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[4] This point was raised by Maité Cruz Tleugabulova in a class discussion of *Racism and Sexual Oppression*.

[5] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Picador, 2003), 60.

The other important development in this final transcription is in the causal explanation of deviance. With the advent of modern biology, such variation in the human species can be explained by genetic lineage and degeneration. This is so important because sexuality takes on a whole new centrality that it did not before. In the "morphology stage" blacks could be understood to be prone to abnormal sexuality, but it was not the same problem because this deviance could not be understood to be transferrable *through* sex. It is in this specific sense that biological racism (the defense of the human species, of which Nordic whites are the highest ideal) is necessarily sexualized (carried through genetic transmission over time).

The redefining of "race" in terms of biological species, and the recasting of racialized communities within as "developmentally arrested humans," also allows for elimination of deviant or abnormal individuals to proceed without appearing to target whole communities of people *per se.* Defense of the human race was only *de facto* defense of whiteness, under this rubric then, not defense of a collectivity (as with the earlier two moments). McWhorter points out, for instance, that "Many of the articles and speeches that have come down to us from that time, if read in isolation, appear to be referring to the progress or improvement of the *human* race, not the white race or the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic race alone. But to most educated, self-identified white Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, the future—new and improved—human race *was* the white race." (202)

This is important because (a) it is the basis on which the whole sexual regulation of whites proliferates, (b) it serves as the crucial analogizing linkage between, for instance, blacks and developmentally disabled children (i.e., not different in *kind* from other children, but imperfect versions of them), and (c) it distinguishes 'good', scientific eugenics from "bad" Nazi, racism (i.e., the Nazi's really *did* think that Jews were categorically different, rather than just understanding the individuals within their community to be correlatively related to degeneration).

The function of genealogy is to undermine either universalizing or teleological histories. In the case of racism, it is a universalizing history that must be destabilized, or the view that people were always racist, and always racist in the same way, and hence that racism is natural, hard-wired, or inevitable. As Foucault argues in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," we tend to impose the present on the past, thus fortifying our *status quo*. One example of this projection of the present onto the past that is destabilized by McWhorter's genealogy is the assumption that the first European settlers in North American were already racist (as we know it). It is assumed, for instance, that it was a pre-existing racism that led Europeans in North America to enslave Africans. McWhorter argues, however, that European settlers began enslaving Africans not because the Africans were black and the Europeans held the racist view that black-skinned people were inferior to whites, but rather for socio-economic reasons: the unscrupulous settlers simply needed a cheap labor source and whites were protected by European laws while Native Americans could escape easily to their communities, being familiar with the terrain. Africans were the most practical people to enslave, not because they were viewed as biologically inferior to whites or to Native Americans for that matter, but because they had no rights, did not know the land, and had no communities on the continent to which they could escape. Enslaving blacks had the additional advantage of divided black laborers from white laborers in status, which interfered with solidarity and thus weakened the

possibility of joint rebellion. After a certain time, however, since only black people were enslaved, slavery came to seem like the natural state for blacks, or to be associated with skin color.

This is how morphological racism developed: the state of enslavement came to seem natural to or derivative of the very characteristics of the bodies of blacks since it was black bodies that one always saw enslaved. Race ceased to refer merely to different (and not necessarily hierarchically-ranked) lineages, but to skin color, hair texture, and facial structures that were themselves taken to be indicative of internal physiologies (greater or lesser rationality and sexuality), and to greater or lesser worth as human beings. We have now forgotten that Africans were not initially differentiated from whites because differentiation seemed proper to their bodies, but being genealogically reminded of this fact makes morphological racism seem less inevitable.

Scientific Racism

Much as the shift from seeing race as custom or lineage to seeing race as hierarchically-ranked morphological types "happened first of all as a matter of economic and political expedience and then as a matter of psychological and social consolidation of power and status, not as a result of innovations in scientific theory," (77) so with the next shift in the history of race, that from seeing races as morphological categories to seeing races as developmental stages. As one of the "factors and forces" that gave rise to the view of non-whiteness as "developmental failure," McWhorter lists "the emergence in the 1830s of a strong and vocal abolition movement in the United States that compelled proponents of slavery to formulate, for the first time, a coherent justification for their practices." (110) New biological theories were invented and rallied to support the socio-economic cause of maintaining slavery in the face of growing political opposition.

McWhorter's argument about race in these pages is similar to Thomas Laqueur's argument about sex in *Making Sex: Bodies and Genders from the Greeks to Freud*.[6] According to Laqueur, the nineteenth-century emergence of the idea of two biological sexes came about in response to growing political agitation on the part of Suffragettes. Prior to the nineteenth century, one did not *need* a scientific account of how males and females were morphologically and developmentally different in order to justify their different social roles or the legal and political disenfranchisement of women; Aristotle, in his *Politics*, like two thousand years of political theorists after him, simply takes women's inferiority for granted, seeing no need to ground his assertions about women's place in society in his biological views about male and female bodies.[7] It is only with the emergence of the feminist movement that nineteenth-century men became worried enough about gender to develop a biological science of sexual

[6] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Bodies and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

[7] So deeply entrenched is the view today that morphological or biological differences must be the cause of social differences that many feminist scholars responding to Aristotle's claims about women in the *Politics* claim that the sexism of this work is grounded in the biological treatises. Aristotle himself never makes this connection, however, and his 20th century feminist commentators do not perceive how anachronistic it would have been for him to do so. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Chloë Taylor, "Bodies, genders and causation in Aristotle's political and biological theory," *Ancient Philosophy*, volume 23 (2003).

difference. Similarly, McWhorter shows, only with the emergence of an abolition movement did nineteenth-century slaveholders feel the need to recruit a biological science of racial difference. In fact, in some cases it was the *same* scientists using the *same* theories to keep both blacks *and* women in their places, for instance skull measurements indicating relative brain size allegedly showed both that women have smaller brains than men of whatever race and that non-whites have smaller brains than Caucasians. As McWhorter writes, "Nothing could change that fact. No amount of education or training would turn the descendants of Africans [or women] into self-disciplined republicans capable of participation as citizens in a free society." (120)

According to McWhorter, twentieth-century racism is a direct descendent of this nineteenth-century scientific racism, the racism that fueled the eugenics movement. Now-discredited scientific theories linger as "folk knowledge" and it is uneducated people who believe what was once scientific theory. (142) Originally, however, scientific racism was not the racism of "ignorant 'rednecks'" (140) but of élitely-educated scientists. These scientists had the very best education of their time:

> Another Philadelphia-trained American physician, Josiah Nott... a lifelong slaveholder... had the best medical education available in the Western hemisphere at the time, including a residency in Philadelphia under Philip Syng Physick in 1827-29 and a year in Paris at the Hôpital de la Pitié in 1835-36 under Etienne Sèrres and Pierre-Charles-Alexandré Louis. (121)

Whatever their educational pedigree, the things these men said about race (and about gender, and about sexuality) were purely political. As Foucault will show again and again of nineteenth- and twentieth-century science, medical licenses and scientific diplomas are used as "guarantees" that enable politicians to gain the moral authority and credibility of science, giving scientists and doctors an unprecedented normalizing power in a society such as ours. Scientists have a particular ability to pass off their moral, political, and social biases as knowledge, since we are credulous of science and scientists can and do claim that whatever they do not like is biologically inferior, unhealthy, or dangerous.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the invention of new sexual taxonomies. McWhorter shows that in the same period in which (in Foucault's famous phrase) the homosexual became a species, new taxonomies of intellectual grade were coined (morons, idiots, imbeciles, moral imbeciles) and each new category allowed scientists and doctors to institutionalize and have authority over the bodies of more and more subjects. Sexual misconduct could result in categorization as a moral imbecile, while most non-whites were judged to be imbeciles and idiots. A heterosexist, sexist, racist and ableist medicine and psychiatry obtained an ever-expanding power over bodies and lives through these taxonomic measures, ascribing to themselves the authority to categorize an individual and to then institutionalize, sterilize or lobotomize that individual on the basis of that eugenic categorization. These "medical" steps were often taken simply because an individual was deemed "abnormal," and the abnormality in question need only have been non-whiteness, poverty, lack of education, or rejection of bourgeois morality (including heterosexuality).

This is the racism against the abnormal of which Foucault speaks, a lumping rather than a splitting form of racism, under which various types of people suffered from the same forms of oppression at the hands of a psychiatric, medical, normalizing power. As McWhorter describes it:

> Imbeciles, criminals, prostitutes, consumptives, Africans, Asians, Mexicans, Jews, Irishmen, masturbators, deaf-mutes, epileptics, psychopaths, and shiftless Appalachian paupers might look different from one another at a glance, but in effect they were all alike. They were all children out of control, throwbacks, savages, and degenerates. And they all posed a serious threat to the continued purity of highly evolved Nordic germ plasm. This is scientific racism. (140)

With scientific racism, race war theory combines with a theory of natural selection, ideas about species struggling against each other for survival of the fittest, in order to elevate race war discourse to Natural Law. (143) With the theory of degeneration, blacks were affiliated with evolutionary throwbacks, unfit in mental and physiological development and functioning. This meant that they had a health problem that threatened not only the individuals afflicted but society as a whole. Blacks came to be viewed as not simply inferior but dangerous, not only because as evolutionary throwbacks they could be violent, but because they could reproduce.

From Lynchings to Incarceration: Changing Technologies of Power

Scientific racism claimed that blacks were developmentally and functionally inferior to whites. More specifically, because situated closer to nonhuman animals than whites, blacks were argued to be less rational and more sexual than whites, to have incontrollable sexual impulses, like animals in heat, and to be unable to subdue their sexual impulses through reason. A disproportionate amount of black people's allegedly smaller brains were said to be preoccupied by sex, and as a result blacks were suggested to be prone to rape, or, in the case of women, to seducing hapless white boys and weak-willed white men and to corrupting white children. The sexualization of race that characterizes U.S. culture and what Angela Davis has called "the myth of the black rapist"[8] are, McWhorter argues, direct results of scientific racism. Moreover, as McWhorter discusses, complimenting the myth of the black rapist was the myth of the oversexed black woman. It was not just believed that black men were over-sexed, but black women also; they too had over-sized genitals and over-active sex drives:

> They were assumed to be whores and prostitutes, regardless of their actual behavior or lifestyle, insatiable bitches constantly in search of something to fill up their enormous vaginas, luring naive white boys and young men with their primitive wiles in order to produce dangerously degenerate mulattos who might sneak across the color line and pass for white, there to wreak biological havoc for generations. (162)

[8] Angela Davis, "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," in Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class*. (Vintage, 1983), 172-201.

McWhorter situates the myths of the black rapist and the over-sexed black woman within the context of other nineteenth-century myths about sexual predators, for there were simultaneously circulating fears about the imbecilic rapist, the seductive moron, the syphilitic whore, and the homosexual. Against each of these mythic threats, McWhorter writes, "Nordic evolution would absolutely have to be defended." (153) It is the black rapist myth, however, that would have the bloodiest history, because one way that Southern whites would take on the task of "defending" (white) society would be lynchings. McWhorter writes of lynching:

> The point of these horrific procedures was not punishment, at least not primarily. It was twofold: first, a direct challenge to white authority was simply eliminated (although that could have been accomplished with much less pomp and circumstance); and second, the entire black population was subjected to a lesson in discipline. I would maintain, in fact, that this disciplinary purpose was the principal purpose. (159)

The first point (elimination) is indicative of sovereign power: sovereign power is deductive. Rather than managing life, sovereign power takes it away. Sovereign power is also exercised with pomp and circumstance, such as the gory spectacle of the death of Damiens, famously described in the first pages of *Discipline and Punish*. Lynchings seem far closer to the killing of Damiens than to the time management protocols of a modern prison, and yet McWhorter argues that lynchings were primarily disciplinary, for disciplinary power does not just want to punish you, but to shape you into a certain kind of individual. Of course, the lynched individual is eliminated rather than shaped, but the spectacle of lynching aimed to be subject-forming for other blacks who would witness the tortured bodies. McWhorter describes lynching as "biopolitical terrorism," for it does not merely attempt to discipline individuals but an entire population.

For McWhorter, since lynching was primarily about normalizing the black population, keeping them in their place, or setting an example of what would happen to "uppity" blacks, the lynchers knew that their motivation was not fear of black rapists. Indeed, McWhorter points out that the myth of the black rapist is itself a myth since most lynchings did not even involve a trumped up rape charge. Lynchers knew that what they were doing was murder, not vigilante justice. Nevertheless, when attempts arose to stop lynchings, the "myth of the myth of the black rapist" was circulated, and it was argued that the way to stop lynchings was for the police to control black male sexuality forcefully enough that whites would not feel the need to take justice into their own hands. If the white community was sufficiently reassured that the police were taking care of matters, they would not resort to extra-legal measures. Thus, McWhorter argues, "the myth of the myth of the black rapist" was used to justify an expansion of the carceral system that targeted black men. In the post-slavery era and until today, ever greater numbers of black men would be institutionalized in mental asylums and, as we know, even more often in U.S. prisons.

Contra McWhorter, I would insist that the fact that lynchings were intended to serve an exemplary purpose does not distinguish them from sovereign power, since sovereign power with its public *supplices* aimed precisely at setting an example. The spectacle of Damiens' death, like the lynching of blacks in the Southern United States, eliminated an individual and

reasserted the executor's undermined power, but it also served as a warning for other would-be transgressors. In the case of Damiens, it is the sovereign's power that was re-established through the public torture and execution of a regicide, and it was other potential regicides who were warned through this example. In the case of lynchings, it was the white community's claim to sovereign power that was being asserted through the murder of an "uppity" black person, and it was other potentially uppity black people who were being instructed to toe the line. Sovereign power may not have been nearly as clever, systematic or efficient at managing lives as disciplinary power would be, but this is not to say that it had no inkling of the utility of setting an example.

Lynchings asserted the power of whites to seize life, to shed blood; they were thus acts by which white people claimed a sovereign power over blacks, despite the abolition of the sovereign institution of slavery (Foucault describes slavery as an institution of sovereign power in *Psychiatric Power*[9]). While McWhorter argues that lynchings were themselves disciplinary, arguably they were instead attempts at reasserting a recently-lost sovereign power. Lynchings were, however, relatively ineffective, and that is why they were replaced by another tactic, a genuinely disciplinary tactic this time: incarceration in disciplinary institutions. On McWhorter's view we would have to say that at this point institutional forms of disciplinary power (prisons, asylums) replaced a rogue form of disciplinary power (lynchings), or that a non-institutional disciplinary power preceded an institutional disciplinary power. For Foucault, however, discipline more often starts in disciplinary institutions and only later becomes de-institutionalized. Lynchings are perhaps not best understood as disciplinary in themselves, but the myth of a myth that justified these lynchings certainly fed into an expansion of disciplinary power, and of the prison and asylum systems in particular.

This is when lynching stopped. In a typical Foucaultian move, McWhorter argues that people did not stop lynching because they became more humane any more than they stopped abusing the mad or chopping off peoples' heads for this reason. Rather, people stopped lynching blacks, abusing the mad, and chopping off peoples' heads because they discovered more effective manners to control these same people. These new manners of control entailed the supplanting of sovereign power with disciplinary technologies. Thus it is not because American society became less racist that lynchings in the U.S. finally ceased. Rather, they ceased when a more effective means of keeping the black population under white control had been put into place. While the rates of incarcerating black men in American prisons is particularly spectacular and well-known, McWhorter also notes that in the immediate post-lynching era, 75-90% of blacks were deemed "feeble-minded" and thus (white) psychiatrists had the authority to incapacitate the vast majority of blacks in ways far more efficient than the necessarily sporadic lynchings of before. No longer did whites need to laboriously lynch black people because they could just institutionalize them; this created less resistance (the anti-lynching societies were appeased) but the same people were, among other things, prevented from passing on their genes.

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[9] Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-4* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 67-69.

From Eugenics to Family Values

Almost anticipating the title of Foucault's 1976 lecture series, Henry Laughlin, head of Eugenics Records Office, once wrote: "Society must protect itself; as it claims the right to deprive the murderer of his life so also it may annihilate the hideous serpent of hopelessly vicious protoplasm." (cited in McWhorter, 205) Foucault argues in Part V of *The History of Sexuality* that capital punishment is justified under biopower as a way of protecting society, although clearly incarceration would be enough. For the eugenicist, allowing abnormal people to reproduce is comparable to allowing dangerous murderers to live: they are a threat to society and must be destroyed. In Chapter Five, McWhorter writes:

> Like the war on masturbation, the war on the biologically unfit was impossible to win. And that was the beauty of the thing. It could go on forever. It could even steadily escalate. And thus more and more money could be made, more and more alliances consolidated, more and more bodies colonized, manipulated, cultivated, reconfigured, and put to work in the service of systems of biopolitical expenditure and control. The possibilities were endless. But then came that crazy Hitler and his Final Solution, which threatened to jeopardize it all. (224)

McWhorter argues that although Hitler and the Final Solution discredited eugenic societies such as Laughlin's, eugenics itself survived. After WWII, there was a desire to separate the basic ideas of eugenics, in which most Americans still believed, from Hitlerism. This was accomplished by drawing a distinction: while eugenicists only claimed that *most* blacks were genetically inferior, but would judge on a case by case basis, Nazis thought that *all* Jews were inferior. The Nazis were irrational since there are exceptions to general trends of ethnic inferiority. Hitler was mentally ill, queer, even; in an interesting discussion, McWhorter explores the (unfounded) myth that Hitler was gay, which she takes to illustrate how the assumption that abnormality must always relate to a perverse sexuality or sexual problems. Any mental illness must, somehow or other, be traced back to sex and all abnormalities are, ultimately, sexual abnormalities.[10] In contrast to Nazism, the science of eugenics was defended as rational, not queer at all, because it evaluates fitness by individuals, not groups.

Beyond such distinctions, however, it was necessary to take on a change in vocabulary to make eugenics acceptable again. No longer could one speak freely of "race betterment" without sounding like a Nazi, and so eugenicists not only changed the names of their societies and journals, but replaced the term "race" with "family." McLaughlin himself became a crusader for The Family. As McWhorter writes, "Not in the name of The Race but in the name of The Family would eugenics carry on. In the postwar years, *family* would become the semantic

[10] Here we might speculate on another (also unfounded) myth that circulates about Hitler, this time about his alimentary rather than sexual appetites. This is the rumor that Hitler was vegetarian. Apparently, if you are abnormal in your comportment towards humans, you likely not only have a skewed sexuality but skewed attitudes about other animals as well. The normal, heterosexual man is a meat-eater, and Hitler was rumored to be both a plant-eater and gay. For a refutation of this myth, see Rynn Berry, *Hitler: Neither Vegetarian nor Animal Lover* (New York: Pythagorean, 2004).

substitute for *race*." (250) Now instead of saying that we need to protect or better the race (which was already about sex, breeding, reproduction, and good family stock anyway) we talk about the need to protect the traditional (white, middle class, nuclear, heterosexual, monogamous) family. We need family values, we are told, we need pro-family politics.

The pro-family movement remains racist against the abnormal even though it no longer refers explicitly to racial purification. In McWhorter's words, The Family of the family values movement is a "twentieth-century Nordic supremacist invention." (286) This family is not just any kinship group, after all, but is intolerant of any forms of life or living arrangements other than that of the monogamous, heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear family. It favors middle class families and pathologizes the poor. It is paradigmatically white. The family of the family values movement is not a female-headed kinship group, it is not living in a ghetto with grandparents, and nor is it a lesbian couple with no desire for offspring. The family in question is of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, monogamous, nuclear, suburban Leave it to Beaver variety and tolerates no other.

McWhorter argues that family counselling and sex counselling function today to fulfil what was once a specifically eugenic task: advising certain people that they should not reproduce, screening out couples before they can marry or have children, encouraging eugenic couples to unite and helping them to stay together (even if this requires therapy and sexual advice from experts) at least long enough to reproduce and raise normal children. Family counselling and sex counselling are ableist as well as heterosexist: it is presumed to be better not to have children if you run the risk of having disabled children, and better not to raise children if you run the risk of raising them to be queer.

McWhorter has argued throughout her book in support of Foucault's claim that modern racism is racism against the abnormal. Eugenics was clearly a form of racism against the abnormal, targeting not only those deemed abnormal in terms of race and ethnicity, but also in terms of gender, sexuality, mental abilities and able-bodiedness. Although we may no longer favor the vocabulary of eugenics and scientific racism, McWhorter argues that the Family Values movement and the desire for normalcy are themselves the spawn of scientific racism and the eugenics movement. While disavowing the vocabulary of eugenics, most people still want to be normal, to have normal kids, to have normal sex and to have normal neighbors. Most people still think that the government should protect, not individuals, not the poor and the weak, but The (normal) Family. For these reasons, McWhorter concludes by suggesting that as a society we still have the same values of the 1890s and 1920s, even if our vocabulary has changed and our methods have grown more subtle.

Other-isms

Having summarized McWhorter's extraordinary tome, and having quibbled with her on only a few small points, we will conclude by raising one over-arching concern. This has to do with other oppressions besides racism and heterosexism that get raised and dropped or are implicit in McWhorter's book. In this final section, the question will be raised as to whether McWhorter's epistemological and political claims about racism and sexual oppression hold true for these oppressions as well. In her Introduction to *Racism and Sexual Oppression*, McWhorter writes:

> Race was not merely analogous to sexuality as a *dispositif*; in fact, the two are utterly inseparable. It is simply impossible to understand racism in the United States without some understanding of how sexuality functions to normalize individuals and regulate populations. It is impossible to understand **sexism or heterosexism** in the United States without some understanding of how race functions to **humanize and dehumanize** individuals and to produce and reproduce populations. But race and sexuality are not merely mutually influential. They are historically codependent and mutually determinative. Approaching them separately therefore insures that we will miss their most important features. Yet that is just what most people do – even some of the most sophisticated and thoughtful of theorists. **Most feminists don't see racism as a crucial aspect of sexism** (even though they may well believe racism is wrong and should be opposed); likewise, most gay men, lesbians, and many transgender activists don't see racism as a crucial aspect of heterosexism and **gender oppression**; and most people of color, as well as most white antiracists, don't see **sexism or heterosexism** as crucial aspects of racism. The result is that even the most dedicated, persistent, and well-intentioned activists not only fail to bring about the changes they seek but in many instances actually help perpetuate the very oppression and injustice they devote themselves to fighting. (14-15, our emphasis)

As we see in this passage, the "sexual oppression" of McWhorter's title initially refers to both sexism and heterosexism, and sexism just like heterosexism is argued to be inextricably bound up with racism. Feminists as well as queer theorists are called upon to think about race, and critical race theorists are criticized for not theorizing gender as well as sexuality. Not only can we not understand racism without understanding sexism, and vice versa, McWhorter argues, but we cannot resist one without resisting the other. One paragraph later, however, McWhorter writes:

> Nor am I making the sweeping metaphysical assertion that we cannot end one form of injustice or oppression without ending them all. **This is not a book about oppression or injustice in general; it is a book about racism and heterosexism in the United States.** My claims are therefore historically specific: First, race and sexuality are essential organizing forces within specifiable, historically constituted networks of power, networks to which Foucault attached the name *biopower*; biopower would be impossible without them. Second, just as biopower requires race and sexuality, race and sexuality require biopower. They could not function apart from it, nor could they function apart from each other. And third, **we will never understand how either race or sexuality operates, much less organize successfully to end the oppressive conditions and relationships that they underwrite, unless we examine them together**. (15, our emphasis)

Already, sexism has disappeared from the discussion – and reappears but rarely and fleetingly throughout the rest of the book. Within a paragraph, sexual oppression has come to mean heterosexism, and sexism has been elided.

Later in *Racism and Sexual Oppression* it moreover becomes clear that disability and class are caught up with race and sexuality under biopower as well: nonwhites, non-able-bodied people, mentally disabled people, and non-heterosexuals are all "dehumanized" (an oppression that presupposes the simultaneous oppression of nonhumans, or speciesism) because "abnormal," and some people are deemed imbeciles and morons and involuntarily sterilized simply because they are uneducated and poor. This raises the question not only of why sex-

ism is elided from the discussion, but also of why ableism, classism and speciesism are never explicit focuses of McWhorter's book. This is not to ask her to make a "sweeping metaphysical assertion" about all forms of injustice or oppression being interrelated, but just to address the ones that are *already present* in her arguments: sexism is on occasion raised explicitly, ableism and classism are omnipresent throughout the book although not thematized, while speciesism is also implicit throughout the book in the language of dehumanization used by McWhorter as well as in the language of the "subhuman" and "lower species" used by the eugenicists whom McWhorter discusses. Speciesism, classism, sexism, and ableism are thus all tacit topics of McWhorter's book, and so why is the work only *explicitly* about racism and heterosexism?

This may be seen as unfair: perhaps we cannot expect one book to account for so many kinds of oppression. And yet McWhorter is accusing those who discuss race without bringing sexuality into the picture, or who theorize heterosexism without a sophisticated understanding of how race is always already involved in heterosexism, of not simply ignoring certain forms of oppression, but *of not being able to properly understand the form of oppression that they are talking about*, and this failure of understanding could result in perpetuating the very oppression one is hoping to resist. The problem is thus not just political correctness (we must not forget to mention anyone's oppression), but strategic and epistemological: you cannot accurately *know* the oppressions you wish to address if you fail to see the other oppressions with which they are bound up, and if you fail to understand how oppression is working you will likely fail to resist it effectively and may even perpetuate it. But if this is true not just of heterosexism and racism, but also of sexism – as McWhorter says quite clearly – and, as her book implies, ableism, classism and, as we will argue in a moment, speciesism, then it is not asking too much to say that all of these need to be theorized together. Rather, to borrow from and expand on McWhorter's own argument, however complicated, it is *essential* to theorize each of these forms of oppression together in order to understand any one of them. Just as race and heterosexism cannot be theorized apart, the same can be said of ableism, classism, sexism, and of the oppression that is the most silent of all in McWhorter's book, speciesism.

McWhorter's epistemological and political argument can in fact be made with respect to speciesism: that is, the failure to understand how speciesism is bound up with the forms of oppression that McWhorter privileges in her book might very well result in the perpetuation of or failure to effectively resist those oppressions that are her explicit concern. Throughout *Racism and Sexual Oppression*, McWhorter discusses the oppression of human beings that depends on and is facilitated by already-accepted methods of oppressing nonhuman animals. McWhorter discusses state fairs where "Fitter Families" are examined like "livestock" (208) (a problematic term), and many cases of non-whites and abnormal whites whose supposed proximity to "lower species" justifies their sterilization, enslavement or death. The oppression of non-whites and of sexually abnormal humans is shown to be facilitated by and to entail their dehumanization, but the ways in which this dehumanization depends on a prior oppression of nonhuman animals is not noted. We read of Morton, for instance, who argued that:

> Blacks and Native Americans were bestial; as such, they had to be either exterminated or subdued. The kindest choice, surely, was domestication under protection of white male authorities. Against their opponents, who would deport blacks to a future of hopeless savagery in Africa or set them free to roam the American countryside without supervision and proper care, defenders of slavery thus took the high moral ground. (121)

The concept of species that underlies Morton's argument is one in which humanity should either "exterminate or subdue" all nonhuman species; "domestication" is considered the "kindest choice" but outright slaughter is also within white man's moral rights. The perceived problem with the passage on McWhorter's account is the bestialization of blacks and Native Americans, not what is being proposed as the proper fate of beasts. And yet if Morton had not assumed that beasts should be either domesticated or killed and that white men had the moral license to do either to them, he could not have proposed what he did for Native Americans or Africans *just because* he thought they were similar to beasts. As in Morton's logic, the oppression of nonhuman animals is consistently the unquestioned substratum of the oppression of human beings, and this means that the easiest and most common way to justify oppressing a group of humans is to affiliate them with nonhuman animals. This has been done to women and it has been done to non-whites. We might pause to consider, however, that if we didn't *already* think it was acceptable to "brutalize" "brutes," it wouldn't be so easy to brutalize human beings simply by comparing them to other animals. This would be good for the other animals, but also good for us humans.

One response of the oppressed (and the more common one) is to insist on their humanity, their superiority to "animals" and their kinship with their oppressors. In all complaints of the type, "We were treated like animals," the oppression of nonhuman animals goes unquestioned and is reinforced. A better response, albeit less common, is to identify with nonhuman animals in their similar and related oppression – to lump rather than split, we could say. This is to declare: "We have been treated the way nonhuman animals are treated in this society, so we have the epistemic authority to tell you that this is no way to treat a sentient creature." This is what feminist epistemologists have called the "epistemic privilege" of the margin. One knows certain things better when one is marginalized and oppressed, and compassion for the plight of nonhuman animals is, or could be, one of them.

McWhorter does not make this move. We read in her book of the "lethal chamber" (220), a gas chamber that was first invented in the 1880s in England to "euthanize" stray dogs. It was then advocated for use on humans labelled morons or idiots, who were said to have human form but to not be truly human because they were lacking something essential to "man." This argument was made most frequently with respect to those labelled "moral idiots," and thus of people who were of normal intelligence but deemed morally abnormal. In other words, it was homosexuals and promiscuous women (for instance) who were suggested to be euthanizable in the manner of stray dogs. McWhorter writes, "Thus subhuman beings should share the fate of London's curs." (221) We can admit that this is shocking, but as in the previous examples, McWhorter does not question the also shocking use of the lethal chamber for dogs, and yet it is the facility with which we kill dogs, simply because we don't want them in our space, that enables considering killing supposedly subhuman human beings for the same reason and using the same methods. An underlying speciesism is an essential aspect of

the argument of the eugenicists, and if they had not already believed that being nonhuman meant that one might be killed on a whim, they might not have opened the door to gas chambering human beings just because – in their promiscuity or their unwantedness – they could be compared to "curs."

How, then, does speciesism connect to racism against the abnormal? McWhorter writes:

> Human beings are what they are because they surpass all other animals developmentally. Not absolute difference but relative degree of development distinguishes one species from another. From there it was a short step to the idea that degree of development distinguishes one race from another; racial difference, too, could be reduced to developmental degree. (114)

Much of the racism against the abnormal that McWhorter discusses is also speciesism, or already entails and depends on the view that humans are more developed than nonhuman animals, just as some humans are more developed than others. If you can show a human being to be closer than average on this developmental scale to nonhuman animals, then it becomes more permissible to mutilate, kill, involuntarily sterilize, incarcerate, or enslave that person, just as we do to animals of other species all the time. All of the intellectual effort in McWhorter's book and in human liberation movements more generally goes into rejecting the view that some humans are closer than other humans to nonhuman animals, while the speciesist assumption that is utterly bound up with the oppression of human beings goes unquestioned. And yet, much as McWhorter shows that sexual oppression *is* racism, we can argue that racism against the abnormal *is* speciesism, in the sense that it actively produces the category of "the human," beyond just privileging it over other species as though these were pregiven categories. A better strategy than protesting "dehumanization" is thus to reject the language of dehumanization and the privileging of the (normal) human that goes with it.

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