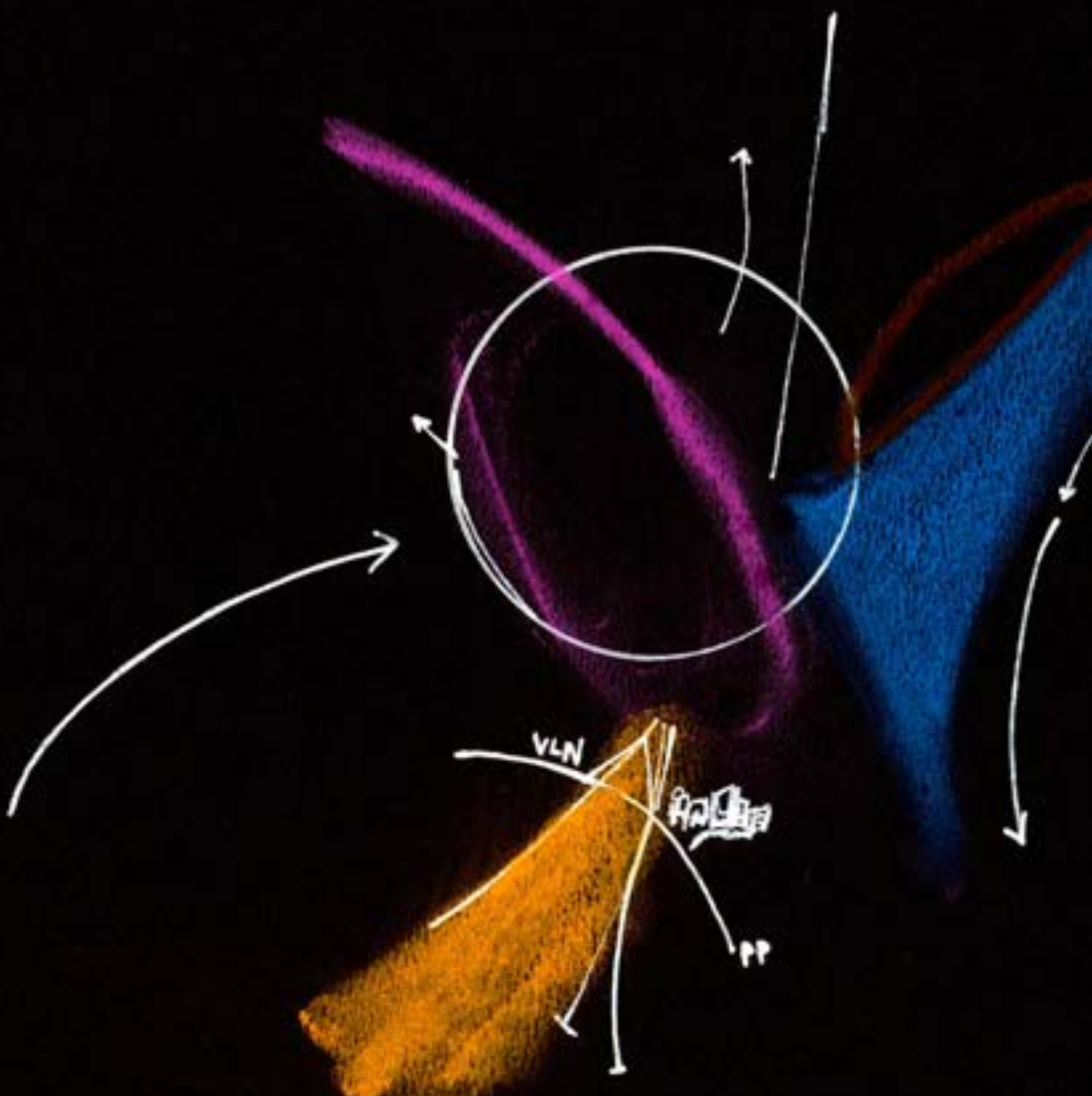
The Anarchy of Black Religion

A Mystic Song

J. Kameron Carter



The Anarchy of Black Religion

BLACK OUTDOORS
Innovations in the Poetics of Study

A series edited by J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak

The Anarchy of Black Religion

A Mystic Song

J. Kameron Carter

Duke University Press
Durham and London 2023

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project editor: Lisa Lawley
Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson and
Typeset in Portait and Canela by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Carter, J. Kameron, [date] author.
Title: The anarchy of Black religion : a mystic song / J. Kameron Carter.
Other titles: Black outdoors.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2023. | Series: Black outdoors | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022048865 (print)
LCCN 2022048866 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478025030 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478020042 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478027027 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Race—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Racism against Black people—United States. | Racism—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Evangelicalism—Political aspects—United States. | White supremacy movements—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Religion and politics—United States—History—21st century. | Political culture—United States—History—21st century. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Black Studies (Global) | RELIGION / General
Classification: LCC BL65.R3 C36 2023 (print) | LCC BL.R3 (ebook) | DDC 230.089—dc23/eng20230407
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022048865
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022048866

Cover art credit: Renee Gladman, *Untitled (brown, blue)*, 2020. From the series *Suddenly We Have the Feeling: Scores, 2019–2022*. 8½ × 11 in. © Renee Gladman. Courtesy of the artist.

For Charles H. Long,
belated teacher and friend (in memoriam)

and for Kennedi, Madison, and now Atlas

"Anarchism" is an open and incomplete word,
and in this resides its potential.

—Saidiya Hartman

Contents

Acknowledgments

It is a joy and gift, an honor and privilege, to do what I do. I mean learning, teaching, pondering, imagining, dreaming, and writing. This book, which is about the spiritual vocation of black radicalism and which unfolds between the notions of anarchy (as spiritual craft) and mysticism (as political activity), offers a perfumed trace of that imagining and dreaming. But in no way do I do what I do alone. Here's a nowhere-near-exhaustive list of folks who've helped me—some up close, others more from afar—in one way or another to imagine, dream, and write this book. They are colleagues, friends, and loved ones in the tender relation of anarchy.

The seeds that would germinate into this book surely go back to my time on the faculty of Duke University and the many fruitful conversations, sometimes on walks through Duke Forest or at coffee shops or the Mad Hatter, with colleagues and friends, some of whom are yet at Duke and others of whom, like me, have moved on. They are Esther Acolatse, Rey Chow, Valerie Cooper, Michaeline Crichlow, Joseph Donahue, Tom Ferraro, Amy Laura Hall, Michael Hardt, Sharon Holland, Tsitsi Jaji, Willie James Jennings, Kimberly Lamm, Nathaniel Mackey, Jarvis McInnis, Ebrahim Moosa, Fred Moten, Anthea Poitier-Young, Luke Powery, Ebony Marshall Turman, William C. Turner Jr., Priscilla Wald, Lauren Winner, and Joseph Winters.

I wrote this book while at Indiana University (IU) Bloomington, my current academic home, and have no doubt that the welcome, embrace, and encouragement I have received from colleagues and friends there have aided me in writing this book. I must mention, specifically, colleagues in religious studies and in my affiliate departments of English and African American and African diaspora studies: Maria Hamilton Abegunde, Heather Blair, Candy Gunther Brown, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Constance Furey, David Haberman, M. Cooper Harriss, Laura Carlson Hasler, Nur Amali Ibrahim, Sarah Imhoff, Michael Ing, Kevin Jacques, Meredith Lee, Rebecca Manring, Patrick Lally Michelson, Richard Nance,

Judith Rodriguez, Jeremy Schott, Stephen Selka, Rebecca Sheldon, Aaron Stalnaker, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, and Sonia Velázquez. I must also make special mention of poet Ross Gay, who's not just a colleague at IU but has become a dear friend. I've learned from him that gratitude, delight, and basketball on the asphalt streets of North and West Philly are all of the spirituality of anarchy that I am trying to think about in this book.

Thank you to colleagues and friends beyond IU: Gil Anidjar, Jeremy Biles, Karen Bray, Mikael Broadway, Amy Carr, Raymond Carr, Eleanor Craig, Clayton Crockett, Spencer Dew, Seth Gaithers, Amy Hollywood, Brooke Holmes, R. A. Judy, Catherine Keller, Tiffany Lethabo King, Carlos Manrique, Nadia Marzouki, Leonard McKinnis, M. NourbeSe Philip, Mercy Romero, Noah Salomon, Devin Singh, Corey B. D. Walker, Dorothy Wang, Calvin Warren, Andrea White, Reggie Williams, and An Yountae.

I am grateful to those who came and listened to presentations I gave in connection with the book. Parts of chapter 2 were presented in October 2021 at the University of Chicago Divinity School to Professor Sarah Hammerschlag's graduate class on The Fetish, while parts of chapter 4 were presented in November 2021 as a talk, also at the University of Chicago Divinity School. In both settings, the comments, questions, and engagements were incredible and helped enhance aspects of the argument. I am grateful particularly for Professor Hammerschlag's and Professor Alireza Doostdar's Q&A engagements with me on poetics in relationship to my reading of Charles Long on the mathematics of the ellipse and the circle and on the grammatology of ellipsis. I'm also grateful for the vibrant exchange with Professor Mark Payne (University of Chicago, classics) on the etymological and other connections between ellipse, ellipsis, and the astrological phenomenon of eclipse among certain Greek classical writers in the context of the argument I make in chapter 4. Interlocutions with Professor Kris Trujillo (University of Chicago, comparative literature) on how mysticism functions as a literary device and reading strategy in this book and what it could mean for critical theory have also helped me strengthen the argument. I must also mention Dr. David Niremberg. Before he left as dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School to become the current director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, vibrant conversations with him on mathematics, religion, and the humanities, on "race" in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and finally on Charles Long and his beautiful complication of, and in many respects yet to be reckoned with, Afro-diasporic extension of the Chicago School of the study of religion have left their traces on this book as well.

I mention two final contexts in which I was privileged to present some of the material of this book. I am grateful to the current president of the American

Society for the Study of Religion, Barbara Holdrege, for inviting me to offer a talk on the imagination of matter in Charles Long's thought. Drawing on parts of chapter 2 of this book, the talk positioned Long's notion of the "imagination of matter" as bridging questions of race, settler colonial violence, and ecological catastrophe. The conversation crackled with energy and has left its traces on this book.

On the invitation of Will Storrar, director of the Center for Theological Inquiry, I was honored in March 2022 to offer the William H. Scheide Lecture on Global Concerns, where the general theme for the year was "Religion and the Natural Environment." For the lecture, I drew again on material from chapter 2. The conversation was wonderful in so many ways, but I am particularly grateful for the comments and questions offered by Dr. Peter Paris, himself a former student of Charles Long.

I am grateful to the Anticolonial Machine—Colin Dayan, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Sora Han, Lenora Hanson, Laura Harris, David Lloyd, Fred Moten, Dylan Rodriguez, and Atef Said—for reading parts of this book in manuscript form and offering truly invaluable conversation and suggestions. When I was finding my way into a different approach to the study of religion, one that did not simply "apply" ideas from black studies and poetics but one that itself is a practice of black study, this group received and intellectually held me. With them, I relearned the study of religion as a function of black study—full stop. This book bears the traces of conversations with this group of friends on topics far beyond the immediate topic of the book itself. My gratitude to you all for friendship and intellectual comradery in the beauty of incompletion is itself incomplete and always will be—completely beyond words.

Kevin Quashie and Sarah Jane Cervenak have been immense supporters of me and this project. From the time I first read Kevin's *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, which is one of the few works of scholarship that's actually moved me to tears, and reached out to him to express my gratitude and admiration of his work, he's been a friend and encourager as I worked to make this book a reality. Thank you.

And to Sarah. What can I say, except that since Fred connected us and our collaboration started in 2014, it's been about the practice and poetics of study filled with cake and laughter, as you rightly say, to facilitate imagining something else, being somewhere else, even somewhen else (if I might put it this way). With Candice Benbow and Matt Elia (the other two who fill out the crew), we have been a band of mu-wanderers in black gathering, in the anarchy of black religion.

There is also a community of friends who provided me with profound intellectual and spiritual care throughout the process of writing this book and beyond. They are Jeremy Gilmore, Mario Holmes, Rev. Clarence Laney, Lisa Laney,

Donyelle McCray, Mark Ramsey, Jemonde Taylor, and Denise Thorpe. I must make special mention of Genna Rae McNeil. Uncannily, God (and I have no other way of accounting for it) seems to have you check in on me always when it's most needed. My gratitude to you runs deep. Your wisdom and encouragement and love helped me get this book to the finish line and yet help me keep on keeping on.

Thank you to the two anonymous reviewers of this book. The care, attention, and suggestions you offered me have, without a doubt, made this a better book. They were a gift.

Thanks to Ryan Kendall, Lisa Lawley, James Moore, and all of the people at Duke University Press for helping to make this book a reality. I especially want to express my gratitude to Ken Wissoker, my editor at Duke. You've been superb in handling the book. I am grateful to the Editorial Advisory Board of Duke University Press for its suggestions and comments.

Finally, and most important, I want to thank my family. In everything I do, it's always with my mom (Rose) and grandmom (Hattie) still in mind. Though gone many years now, they both remain the fire in my bones. Their lives of joy—my momma's dancing and my grandmomma's organ playing and preaching—inspired me to imagine something else. I'm grateful to my dad and stepmom, who wrap me in their prayers as I do what I do. I'm grateful to my daughters, Kennedi (your art, photography, and intellectual seriousness move me; and by the way, when you gonna gimme my Christina Sharpe book back? LOL.) and Madison (us nerding out on your engineering and physics schoolwork, and on cosmology stuff, actually, helped me quite a bit on parts of this book; your genius and tenderness awe me; you're the bomb). And I can't forget my goddaughters, Jocelyn and Jaelle. During breaks from writing or while chillin' on weekends, Jaelle brought me bouquets of happiness by insisting that I play UNO with her. She's a straight-up boss who takes no prisoners and takes me down every time. But that's cool 'cuz the point is the playing. That she insisted that I play, that we dared to play—that was its own kind of anarchy; UNO and so much more sustained me through the writing.

Near the end of the writing of this book, my grandson, Atlas, to whom (with my daughters) I've dedicated this book, was born. It was bumpy getting him here, but he's here. He arrives already having to carry too much, this world demanding too much. But his name reminds me, yet again, to dream otherwise, to imagine beyond what is, to envision and enact more than this narrow now. Other worlds beyond the very notion of *world*. Kennedi and Richie, you're already amazing parents.

Finally, to my wife, friend, and partner, Felicia Cheryl. Your love and energy and tenderness and care sustained me through writing this book—and through so much more. You keep me present, reminding me of a love broad and wide, without restriction or exclusion, another name for which is God's love. You have all my heart. And yes, we takin' the train.

An Anarchic Introduction (Antiblackness as Religion)

The sea of people [storming the US Capitol on January 6] was punctuated throughout by flags. Mostly variations of American flags and Trump flags. There were Gadsden flags. It was clear that the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians. I saw the Christian flag directly to my front, and another had "Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president." Another, "Jesus is king."—DC POLICE OFFICER DANIEL HODGES, congressional testimony (2021)

Religion and January 6

This is a book I had not planned to write. When I was only a chapter or so away from the finish line on a different one, this one insisted on being written. Behind it lay nothing less than the harrowing events that gripped the United States and indeed the world in 2020 and 2021 and that persist into 2023, the year of this book's publication.

Regarding those harrowing events, I mean many things. We can start with the coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic, which besides grinding the world economy to a halt on its inception has taken millions of lives planetwide and hundreds of thousands in the United States, the country from which I write. As I write this introduction, we've just brought in the 2022 New Year, and the omicron variant of the coronavirus is causing spikes in hospital admissions and a spike in deaths, principally among the unvaccinated. There are debates as to whether schools should open back up and with what requirements. In such cities as Chicago and

New York City, students themselves are criticizing the health conditions of their schools. Walking out of classrooms, they are protesting.

I also have in mind the police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky; and others, as well as the killing of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia, and others like him, killed by white citizens of the state who in effect deputized themselves to be police. But I also have in mind the response of activists, many operating under the banner of the movement for black lives, or the Black Lives Matter movement, to these killings with immense protests in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The protests were not just US based. They were also international, with protests in the United States and abroad, larger in many instances than those of the 1960s. And, finally, I mean the fascism of then president Donald J. Trump. I have in mind here both Trump's and his administration's absolute incompetence in responding to the pandemic, leading to the loss of more lives than had to be lost, as well as his clampdown in response to the protests against police violence.

That clampdown is perhaps best symbolized by what I see as the bookend events in Washington, DC, outside of the White House, in the summer of 2020 and then on a winter day in January 2021. On June 1, 2020, amid protests in Washington, DC, against the police killing of George Floyd, law enforcement with Trump's backing used tear gas and other riot-control tactics to clear out Lafayette Park, which is across from the White House, as well as streets surrounding the park. Flanked by government officials including General Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dressed in military fatigues, Trump then walked from the White House through the violently cleared park to St. John's Episcopal Church, where he posed for a photo op, holding a Bible (upside down no less), thus claiming a kind of religious or sacred sanction for what he'd done in reasserting police as political authority over the protesters and indeed in clearing the ground(s), or, as we also might think of it, in reclaiming, reenclosing, or resettling it.

Bookending this June 1 event is the white nationalist assault on the US Capitol building, again in Washington, DC, roughly six months later, on January 6, 2021. This was the day that the US Congress was to certify the electoral college vote following the November 2020 US national election, thus affirming Joseph R. Biden to be the forty-sixth president of the United States and making official Trump's defeat at the polls and his loss of the presidency. But as we know, a white nationalist mob, egged on by Trump and his political cronies, some of them current members of the US Congress, assaulted the Capitol building. Scaling its walls like insects to find an entry point into the building, the mob attacked the Capitol with a view to stopping the certification of the electoral

college votes in favor of Biden and even "hang[ing] Mike Pence," vice president of the United States, for fulfilling his constitutional duty as vice president to oversee the certification process.

Among the many things that seized my attention as I watched it all go down—on one level shocked but on another not in the least—were the many religious symbols and signs throughout the white nationalist mob that was attacking the Capitol. Indeed, in a hearing on the January 6 Capitol assault, DC police officer Daniel Hodges testified before the US Congress about the immense presence of religious imagery throughout the "terrorist" mob during the attack. In his testimony he observed that "the sea of people [storming the Capitol] was punctuated throughout by flags. Mostly variations of American flags and Trump flags. There were Gadsden flags." He continued, "It was clear that the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians. I saw the Christian flag directly to my front, and another had 'Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president.' Another, 'Jesus is king.'"[1]

There is much more that needs to be said about this event as a moment within the long history of the "religion of whiteness," but what I limit myself to saying now is simply that the January 6 "insurrection," as it has been miscalled (it was really a reassertion of the logic of whiteness and the fascism that since this nation's settler colonial birth has been internal to its democratic project), bookends or works hand in glove with Trump's political pastoralism, his act of political theology, through the reenclosure or the seizure of Lafayette Park back on June 1, 2020, roughly six months earlier.[2] The bookend incidents of June 1, 2020, and January 6, 2021, together form one of the most high-profile expressions of the settler colonial antiblackness of the religion of whiteness.

The Problem of Religion

I mention all of this because it is the backdrop against which this book, *The Anarchy of Black Religion*, demanded that I write it. This is a book about the religiosity of the moment, unpacked along two central lines of argumentation. In the first, I offer the beginnings of a statement about the logic of religion that is the underbelly of statecraft, indeed, the underbelly of what we have lived through and remain yet caught within as some postpandemic new normal sets in. Concisely put, I consider antiblackness as itself a mode of religion, the religion of antiblackness. That is, I explain antiblackness by thinking it in relationship to the modern invention of religion. But as I show, the modern invention of religion works in close connection with the emergence of capitalist commerce and exchange and the idea of the state as grounding "the political," on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as undergirding a racialized conception of "the human" that itself

is bound up with enclosing the earth and with an imagination of matter or a way of conceiving matter through an individuating or dividing and separating logic and practice of (anti)blackening. The present struggle is over matter, over matter-ing otherwise, over rematerialization, and in this way over the social. All of this is what is at stake in the modern invention of religion. That is, at stake is the question of the human, the imagination of matter, and a violent evisceration of sociality; indeed, at stake is the question of the earth itself, which entails both the loss of the ability to dwell therewith and thereon and with each other owing to a white science or political mythology of individuation or a mine-not-thine imagination of the world. Such an imagination, which is an imagination of matter, fuels practices of separation for the "ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen," as W. E. B. Du Bois once put it.[3] But in order to understand the specific religiosity of the crises confronting us—from those just described to other, related crises, including the pressing crisis of gun violence (I write this very sentence under the shadow of the gun massacres in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas) and the crisis of global climate change—we must release the study of what is called *religion* (including the study of what is called *black religion*) from being locked up inside of the study of church history or the study of religion at the level of recognizably religious institutions and cultic orders and their attendant theological architectures.[4] To release the study of religion from such frameworks creates room for an understanding of religion as a structuring imagination of matter and culture.

This book takes on the challenge of reframing our understanding of religion. But before getting directly into the weeds of this task, I want to note at the outset that several fine works have emerged that address religion as it relates to white supremacy and thus as it relates to our present political travails. In differing ways, these works put pressure on commonsense understandings—on both sides of the political and cultural divide—of what religion is or means, on where religion is happening and where it supposedly is not happening, and on who is within religion's sphere and who, atheistically or agnostically perhaps, is not within its sphere. They implicitly call attention to the religious work that the religion-secular or the sacred-secular divide does in structuring and keeping alive racial capitalist culture.

For instance, in a provocative new book, historian of American religion Anthea Butler historicizes the Trumpism of American evangelicalism by situating its emergence within the backlash to the South's defeat in the US Civil War.[5] Butler, in effect, invites a consideration of white evangelical American religion as part of what Saidiya Hartman has helped us understand as the general "afterlife of slavery." More precisely, one might say that Butler reads white evangelical

religion as part of the general "afterlife of the master," as part of the master(ing) or ruling class. Butler's provocative historical investigation advances an understanding of white evangelical religion and, more broadly, white nationalism as an expression of the afterlife of mastery and slavery.[6]

Biblical studies scholar Obery Hendricks also in an important new book similarly takes on white evangelicalism, though in his case from the angle of white supremacy as based in a certain weaponizing of the Bible. In so doing, white evangelicals are, as Hendricks puts it, "destroying our nation and our faith."[7] Hendricks's book, which I read alongside the much-too-underread work of towering scholar of the black culture and the Bible Vincent Wimbush on "scripturalization" as a general protocol of racial capitalism and as central to "white men's magic," is helpful in analyzing Trump's photo op in which he strikes a pose with an upside-down Bible.[8] Read with Wimbush, Hendricks helps us understand that we are not just inside of the tyranny of a certain way of approaching the Bible; rather, we are caught within a regime of scripturalization or rhetorical authority that underwrites the religion of antiblackness and thus that underwrites whiteness both in its right-wing, Christian nationalist, and white evangelical instantiations and in its more progressivist modes of liberal governance.

As a last, brief example, I mention the cultural critic, MSNBC news commentator, and African American studies scholar Eddie Glaude Jr.'s newest work, which engages writer James Baldwin. While the argument regarding religion is a bit oblique, in *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*, Glaude demonstrates how in his own way Baldwin worked artistically to intercept American religion with a view to releasing a new kind of religiosity, a new imagination of love. Across his novels, plays, essays, and journalism, Baldwin proposed a vision of love that was nonexclusionary and in this way was revolutionarily improper. As such, it fostered an alternate religiosity, one might say, one that both broke with and yet radically extended the religiosity of his Pentecostal upbringing. Following Baldwin, Glaude makes a moving case for such "love-improper," indeed, for how such improper love—where *improper* means flight from what's politically (and otherwise) proper regarding who stands within and who outside of our circles of kith, kin, intimacy, and belonging—might allow America to "begin again" and thus renew the American democratic experiment.[9]

Again, what these books all have in common is that in their own ways they are contending with the terms of religion. That is, they are contending with the terms that inform whom one considers themselves bound or not bound to (one meaning of *religion*, or *religio*, is what binds together; *religion*, then, is a sociopolitical term) and how the question of connectedness and even kinship informs

the present crises of the buckling of democratic institutions. This book joins these and similar works, though the tack I take—the approach to frying this fish, as the saying goes—is a bit different.

The Anarchy of Black Religion

The Anarchy of Black Religion surfaces that deeper philosophical, theological, and religious history that is not past but lives within and animates the present. When I say *the present*, I do indeed include in it the Trump era of entangled pandemics and what's emerging in its wake. But I also mean something more, for in truth Trump, and the Trump aftermath, which for understandable reasons has seized our cultural and political attention, is but the latest in a long train of after-effects of a longer-standing catastrophe. That catastrophe I've named *the settler colonial religion of antiblackness*. The terms in this formulation—*settler*, *colonial*, *religion*, and *antiblackness*—are vital and inseparable. In unpacking how, my goal is to take us to the foundations of this problem as bound up with the foundations of (Western) modernity. That is, I take us in this book to the foundations of modernity as a racially gendered arrangement of religion and the secular, of religion and culture. A keyword I'll be engaging to unpack this is the highly flexible Greek word *archē* (ἀρχή). More specifically, I think with and extend the already expansive work of the late scholar of religion, culture, and black life Charles Long (1926–2020) to advance an understanding of colonial and capitalist modernity as premised on an *archē*, or specific foundation and principle of sovereignty or rule (these terms being within the semantic range of the Greek word *archē*) connected with the modern invention of religion.

Far too unknown in black studies, ethnic studies, and critical theory and continental philosophy, Long rigorously argued that a "new *archē*" of being and knowing, of ontology and epistemology—indeed, a unique mythos and cosmology—had come to structure or organize the present.[10] This new *archē* emerged with and through the contacts, commerce, and exchanges that took place in the Atlantic World from the mid-fifteenth century forward in what is often called the Age of Discovery and Conquest. Differently put, a new *archē* of (human) being and knowing emerged with and through the simultaneous appearance of a people who would be called *black* and something that would be called *black religion* in the Atlantic World. Modernity is of this natal occasion. It was the occasion of the imposition of a racial capitalist cosmology upon the earth. Long contended that animating that natal occasion is a colonial *archē* that, through the emergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a series of "sciences" intent on understanding Man, or "the human," extended or mutated into a system of knowledge

about what counts as real, about "the world *as such*."[11] We've been subjected to the colonial idea(l) of "the world," made its conscripts, its uncomfortable denizens, undergone its process of "genesis." Sylvia Wynter names what I am talking about "the coloniality of being and knowing."[12] Founded in a colonial *archē*, or a principle of being, to use the language afforded us by Long, who is of Wynter's generation, modernity would in due course come to articulate a philosophical or "Enlightenment *archē*," a knowledge of the human being as a certain kind of Subject in a certain kind of world. What I am trying to communicate here is that these terms—*the human*, *the Subject*, and *world* (or as we often so easily and casually say, *the world*)—and the practices that carry them are neither self-evidently given nor innocent.

This invites a question: What manner of Subject, what manner of Man, or rather human, or rather hu/Man, is this? This is a Subject who in being, supposedly, self-determined, self-possessed, and of autonomous mind claims rationality for itself. As such, this Subject (rendered with a capital S to signal its imagined, which is also a brutal, magnanimity), can subject other things to itself. It can rule. It can own things, beginning with itself, though this properly self-possessed and self-determining Subject cannot be subjected to another. In rationally owning itself as the basis of owning things, including the capacity to lay claim to the earth itself, it declares itself to be the veritable embodiment of "freedom." And yet, it is also the case that within this cosmology, within this imagination of "the world," Man's freedom expresses a capacity of self-rule for the sake of ruling over other things. Within the world, or more precisely within such a cosmology, this is what freedom means. Freedom is a function of sovereignty and sovereignty is a function, an expression, of freedom. This is, to introduce another term, *sovereignty*.

This account of the Subject, of freedom, and of ownership is a fused adumbration of both Saidiya Hartman's and Denise Ferreira da Silva's accounts of the racial dialectic that constitutes modernity as a "scene of subjection" and a "scene of obliteration."[13] Such a dialectic, premised on settler logics of property, propriety, and properness, constitutes a world that is Man's "home" even as those blackened or rendered thingly or thinglike and even animallike and monstrous with respect to that world (I explore this in chapter 1) both are not at home in that world and host a kind of utopian potential to unhome or undo the world owing to an insistent refusal of the very world that has been imposed on them and extracts from them, even as that world also refuses them standing.[14] Borrowing from Sigmund Freud, we might call the animacy of such things precisely in their thingliness, in their opacity, in their nontransparency, which is to say, as black(ened) and dark(ened) things, "*uncanny* (*umheimlich*)."[15] They

are uncanny things. Strange and estranged, strained, stranded and unhomely, the opacity of dark(ened), black(ened) things is the seized-on backdrop against which Man enacts himself, or "worlds" himself, as a rational Subject or as the measure of the properly human.

Under the rubric of *archē*—the *archē* of racial capitalism as the basis of the modern world system of empire, and also *archē* as a cosmological entry point for investigating how matter itself has come to be imagined or subjected to (anti) blackening—Long was concerned with all of this.[16] I argue that across his oeuvre Long was advancing the proposition that, from its colonial-Enlightenment inception up through the postcolonial, post-Enlightenment reorganization of what Erica Edwards has called "the terror of empire," particularly as Long started taking stock of it beginning in the 1960s (that reorganizing would reach a counterrevolutionary head in 1968 and would set in motion a neoliberal reconfiguration of empire), this *archē* has been the propulsive force of "the culture of empire."[17] Indeed, within the culture of empire, this *archē* was the propulsive force of the university even as the modern university was poised to establish "African American studies" (and similar and related critical "studies" such as women's studies, etc.) within its fold.[18]

Given this, Long's provocation, which across the pages of this book I work to clarify but also extend or poetically think or innovate with, was twofold. On the one hand, his provocation turned on the argument that the nineteenth-century emergence of the scientific study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) and its refinement across the twentieth century was at the forefront of empire's new terms of cultural order and knowing. And yet, on the other hand, he invited a consideration of what has been called *black religion* not as fulfilling "a salvific wish" of redemption from racial-colonial terror through uplift or incorporation into and recognition within the terms of order but rather as registering what I underscore as an alternate cosmology, an *an-archic* or unstately and potentially stateless disturbance of the *archē* of religion that in fact establishes the modern world and its terms of order.[19] Understanding this requires coming to terms with black religion's ambivalent relationship, indeed its anarchic relationship, to the very notion of *religion* as one of the world's—the modern world's—keywords.

Before proceeding further, given its central place in my argument, I want to tarry for a moment with this word, *archē*.[20] In this, again, I aim to think with Long, who when he used the term always kept in mind its full semantic range. I have already noted that possible meanings of this Greek term (ἀρχή) are *foundation*, *sovereignty*, or *rule* (and by extension *law*, as in *rule of law*). But there are other meanings as well. *Archē*, Long observes, has the sense of "beginning, starting point, principle, underlying substance as primordial . . . ultimate undemonstrable

principle . . . something 'original.'" These senses of *archē* echo inside of such notions as "indigeneity" and "indigenous people" as well as in such colonially deployed terms as *the primitive*, a term built on the shadow concept of civilization and the civilized.[21] Besides these adumbrations of *archē*, there are others that Long had his eye on as part of the religious structuring of the world. There is *archē* as authorial origin or principle of governance (as in mon*archy*, olig*archy*, and poly*archy*); *archē* as a primary, often charismatic or heroic figure (one example of an *archon*, or a primary figure, is a patri*arch*); *archē* as that which provides the essential rules of the game or proposition; *archē* as the foundation or ground of something (as in the grounds of an argument, or even perhaps in a geological sense, *archē* as actual ground and thus as pointing to the matter or material that is a piece of land, if not earth itself). Finally, there is *archē* in its conveyance of the idea of order, the terms of order.[22]

As I demonstrate in chapters 2 and 3, the modern (re)invention of religion (along with its companion concept of *the secular*) contains within it the terms or the *archē* of a fundamental pandemic or catastrophe. Indeed, the word or very idea of *religion* in its present circulation, which was born with and through early modern transatlantic commerce and exchange, condenses what Sylvia Wynter in a recent interview with Katherine McKittrick describes as our species' "unparalleled catastrophe," at the heart of which was a catastrophic cosmology.[23] In chapters 1, 2, and 3, which may be thought of as part I of this book, I tell a story about this unparalleled catastrophe in the modern (re)invention of religion precisely as the religion of antiblackness. More specifically, this is a story about religion's (re)invention as a matter of the organization of matter itself, matter's would-be subjection to the violence of racial capitalist individuation. That individuation, which represents a transubstantiated "reoccupation" (to borrow Wynter's borrowing of Hans Blumenberg's formulation) of certain Latin Christian protocols of medieval (political) theology, is part of the imposition of a totalitarian universality on matter itself.[24] Out of that imposition and as part of its political manifestation, the state as part of a system of states and as a regulatory apparatus emerged. On the one hand, this began codifying formally in the sixteenth century through the Westphalian international order as a structure of sovereignty that further articulated into the idea of "Europe" and then of "the West" in its simultaneous (racial-occidental) difference from "the East" and (racial-colonial) difference through subjugation of a global South. On the other hand, this imposition of a totalitarian universality on matter is the ~~meta~~physical backdrop for the accumulation and planetary circulation of commodities and capital and now the emergence of petroculture.[25] In both respects, at stake is an imposed trans-substancing of existence's basic *elementa* or energies. That

trans-substancing has happened—or rather, is happening—through processes of extraction. Matter is now cosubstanced with extracted labor, blood now with land dispossessed, screams now sonically with the earth itself.

I am thinking here with Denise Ferreira da Silva, who explains much of what I am trying to get at as an economic structure of "unpayable debt" tied to the symbolic-ethical tools of racial thought and practice as these work to legitimate or justify (precisely within the juridical context of the *archē* of "law and order" and "the rule of law") settler colonial, antiblack, anti-Latinx, and related violences, where the cause of that violence gets attributed not to the way the (colonially racial capitalist) world is organized and structured but to cultural difference, which is to say, to nonwhite or blackened, darkened difference as symbolized by skin color and violently grafted onto flesh as always already registering moral failure and culpability.[26] Ferreira da Silva turns to Octavia Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred* and specifically to Butler's spacetime-jumping protagonist, Dana, to unfold this. In Ferreira da Silva's reading, Dana is an image of "unpayable debt" or of "the wounded captive body in the scene of subjugation."[27] But also, she images an alternate ecology of matter(ing). After Erica Edwards with Terrion Williamson, we might think such mattering as an unprotected maternal ecology that collectively, anti-imperially, and, after Long with Hartman, anarchically preserves sociality even within catastrophe and therefore beyond the constraints of the current order.[28] That this is an issue precisely of how matter is thought and conceived is in many respects at the heart of the matter for Ferreira da Silva and her reading of Butler's Dana. In contemplating her, "[we confront,] on the one hand, the possibility of thinking the *ongoing present* from a 'raw material' (*elemental*) perspective, one that refuses to reduce existence to the forms and functions of the living body or 'social condition'; on the other hand, the recognition that the violence that characterized slavery as a colonial juridico-economic structure has been met with an insistence not to perish, a refusal of the logic of obliteration."[29] This refusal, which ensues from the perspective of "raw material" or of matter as infinite or in unending transition or movement, the perspective, as I examine in chapter 3, that Long spoke of in strikingly similar terms to Ferreira da Silva's as *materia prima*, Ferreira da Silva calls *negativation*, by which she means a "refusal to die, refusal to comply, refusal to give up and give in—to which the mere existence of black persons here/now testifies."[30] This alternate, elemental perspective on or imagination of matter as performed by Butler's Dana, who in *Kindred* images the wounded captive body, "renders the master's tools inoperative," even as a whole range of possibilities for existing otherwise opens up given that inoperability.[31]

Thinking Ferreira da Silva (and black thought in and as black feminist theory) and Long (and the theory of religion and modernity) with and through each other allows me to argue that as a racial capitalist condition of "unpayable debt," modernity is its own type of cosmological imaginary—which is to say, a mode of religion as religio-secularity—whose refusal occurs through that speculative inhabiting of an alternate cosmology, an anarchic imagining of matter. When I speak of (the) blackness (of black religion), precisely in its relatedness to racial hierarchy as part of the knowledge and management systems of a capitalist world but also as referring to what exceeds the identitarian systems of being, knowing, and management, I am speaking to that alternate cosmology of matter's material multiplicity, a cosmology of the crossroads that is often associated in various African and African diasporic cosmologies with the deity Legba.[32] While I speak to this in chapter 5 in relation to Nathaniel Mackey's practice of the poem, for now and as part of this introduction I'll say that in speaking of blackness in this way, as figuring a horizon beyond and in refusal of a colonial, capitalist system of being, knowing, and managing, I am signaling something resonant with what writer Paul Preciado gets at in dislodging the queer, trans condition from the confines of a binary political and epistemological order premised on proper representation (political and otherwise). With recourse to Uranus, the coldest planet in our solar system, and one of the farthest, Preciado moves onto the territory of nonimperial mythology, indeed into cosmology, to articulate a vision of "utopian gender," as Virginie Despentes puts it in the foreword to Preciado's book.[33] "My trans condition," Preciado says, "is a new form of Uranism. I am not a man and I am not a woman and I am not heterosexual I am not homosexual I am not bisexual. I am a dissident of the sex-gender system. I am the multiplicity of the cosmos trapped in a binary political and epistemological system, shouting in front of you. I am a Uranian confined inside the limits of techno-scientific capitalism."[34] The way that I am trying to think about blackness and black religion or the blackness of black religion resonates with this. Indeed, black studies, arguably most evidently in such modes of inquiry as black feminist theoretical practice and experimental poetics (from experimental writing in poetry and the novel to visual arts, music, and the like), has in its own way been reaching for or bringing to some sort of articulacy the open secret of an alternate cosmology, an otherwise imagining of matter and practice of mattering. This alternate cosmology has been in refusal of the ontologization and thus the political theologization of matter, its antiblackening, wherein matter itself was made a scene of extractive subjection precisely by being subjected to ontology in the making of modern, racially gendered subjects (and objects).

Across these pages I analyze the nature of this extractive subjection with specific attention to black racial histories and examples within the violent history of capitalist value and the yet-unfolding history of global raciality. These histories (of value and globality) are matters of matter's blackening. In speaking in this way, I mean to allow my claim about matter's blackening to provide insight into the racialized othering of indigenous and Asian communities, Palestinians and Jews, peoples of the various Eastern bloc nations (something at the forefront of our attention, given the war that rages in Ukraine as I write this), and so on. Specifically, I provide here an argument for how matter's extractive blackening produces a differential structure of racial globality as terror against the earth. Logics and practices of race-ism wherein communities are alienated from land, and more specifically from earth and thereby from each other, come into view as different and yet related, as nonidentical and therefore not collapsible into each other and yet as connected modes of extractive blackening. What I am suggesting here annotates what W. E. B. Du Bois was getting at when he spoke of the color line belting the planet; what Lisa Lowe gets at in her analysis of racism as a global, differential ordering of relations under the rubric of "continental intimacies"; and what Denise Ferreira da Silva gets at in her masterful work on racial globality and more recently on the violent history of value.[35] Among these thinkers, Ferreira da Silva further stands out, as I have already noted, with her attention to the question of matter and individuation, which are central concerns of this book.[36] I join these thinkers, each of whom addresses the terror of modernity as a terroristic materialism by attending to the general blackening of matter and the specific religiosity of that blackening in underwriting the ideologies and institutions of racial capitalism, which itself must be understood as a general socioecological crisis that manifests and operates as a kind of differential network or assemblage of extractive, planetary racialization. Hence, my attention to black racial histories and examples across these pages is never not with an eye on how various modes of differential blackening or racializing operate within the planetary violence of the extractive blackening of matter.

The point that I'm making here accords with what I demonstrate across the first three chapters of this book, namely, that the modern (re)invention of religion through transatlantic commerce and exchange helped configure space and place (that is, the relations among Europeans, Africans, and various indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere and eventually across the planet) through an imagination of time as a progressive sequencing from savage benightedness to rational enlightenment. Within the imagination of space-time that in the context of the emergence of transatlantic commerce and exchange is being imposed on the earth and that institutes "globality," a specific anthropological regime—some have

called it "Man," others the "patriarch-form," others still simply "the human"—is set forth.[37] In this regime there are those considered moderns or self-possessed, rational subjects and others who, in effect, are locked up or subjected to a kind of temporal incarceration, shunted inside of a premodernity that gets signified as "backward," "medieval," "strange," mystical, heretical, or of "fetish religion," a term that in its emergence was but a synonym for *black*, we might even say *blackened*, *religion* (see chapter 3).[38] Those subjected to such space-time sequestration are often, at the level of gender, represented through the figure of the wayward woman, the "witch."[39] What is important to note is that while these terms are meant to signify a temporality that lags behind or an anthropology that indexes an unfulfilled or lagging humanity, what they actually are attempting to incarcerate or put on lockdown is an alternate modality of existence, an alternate imagination of matter. Given this, I'm interested in such terms as *strange*, *mystical*, *heretical*, and so on not as signifiers of a time lag (unmodern benightedness) but as signifiers of dissonance and dissidence—a dissonant and dissident medievalism, the black medieval with the black baroque, we might say, the *mater* as the matter of a black Lucretianism, a black naturalism—that exceed the terms of order, terms set in motion through the modern (re)invention of religion as bound up with the advent of racial capitalism.

The Black Study of Religion; or, Matter(ing) Otherwise

I tell the story about the modern invention of religion with these specific matters in mind, with the matter of the imagination of matter in mind. The matter of the imagination of matter reverberates in Cornel West's phrase "race *matter*s" and is the issue indirectly circled around in the phrase Black Lives *Matter*.[40] In tracing the modern invention of religion, I will be tracking, shall we say, the matter of matter's (anti)blackening. In these chapters particularly, I invite readers to journey with me into this deeper story about the present, into racial capitalism's genealogy within material religion or within religious matter(s). That is, I am inviting readers into a consideration of how we've come to think about matter itself through antiblackness as religion and how the blackening of matter works to organize the world and constitute the political as a structure of antagonism predicated on logics of separability and individuation.

In unfolding this, I link the critical theorizing taking place in black studies with theorizing religion itself. In so doing, I do three things. First, I clarify what religion is, particularly its modern (re)invention, not merely as a matter of its institutional expressions but even more as an orientation to matter with related, material forms of thought. Second, I surface a relationship between the material

(re)invention of religion in the context of Atlantic commerce and exchange and the rise of a racial capitalist world and the way "the human" has been imagined as a denizen of "the world" that's been imposed upon the earth. And, finally, I consider how the modern (re)invention of religion is itself bound up, on the one hand, with what Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has identified as the (anti)blackening of matter in association with the (anti)blackening of black(ened) people and, on the other hand, with the practices of property and the enclosure of the earth.[41]

More specifically, across chapters 1, 2, and 3, or what amounts to part I of the book, I attend to the very imagination of religion and the human that has provided the ground, the *archē*, on which the present is built or that animates our current property-informed understanding of "the world." This property-informed understanding of the world premised on atomistic division and imposed on the earth so as to enclose it—it is *this* that is at the ground or the origin, the *archē*, which is to say, the beginning, of our problems. Such is the genesis of things. By giving attention to modern religion, I consider the emergence of a paradigm of the human inflected through race-gender as technologies of separation, the rise of the modern state, and settler colonial violence against the earth. Another way perhaps to say this is to say that I consider the invention of the idea of religious Man (*Homo religiosus*) as bound up with the rise of Man as a specific kind of political entity (*Homo politicus*, or a citizen-subject of the state) and economic entity (*Homo economicus*). Split between what Sylvia Wynter speaks of as "Man 1" (*Homo politicus*) and "Man 2" (*Homo economicus*), *Homo religiosus* is a *Homo racialis* who in his universality is enlightenment philosophy's transparent subject.[42] That transparency is "whiteness," which while being understood in the symbolic-epidermal register of skin color must also, perhaps more primally, be understood as a certain ethical-civilizational form and practice made manifest through symbolic-epidermal inscription.[43] Denise Ferreira da Silva has analyzed this ethical-civilizational form in terms of the "global idea of race" and more recently under the rubric of the "patriarch-form," which I consider in chapter 4.[44] In this respect, "whiteness" is best thought of as a settler colonial and capitalist cosmology that has spawned an accompanying system of "god(s)," including such vaunted (god-)terms as *Civilization*, *Capitalism*, *Freedom*, and *Man*. These terms function like "god(s)" because in some fundamental sense they are. They are the mythological gods that ground this world, just as the ancient Greeks, for example, had gods that grounded their world. In our case, the gods of this world—Civilization, Capitalism, Markets, Man, and the like—are bound up with modernity's (re)invention of religion. Marked by a set of god-terms, whiteness, then, is an anthropo-genesis, a cosmo-genesis, an *archē*, a worlding, a keyword of the beginning of this racial capitalist world. Whiteness is of "in the beginning . . . ,"

which is just to say (again) that whiteness is the enactment of a cosmology. At the heart of this cosmology is an imagination that we might identify, again with Ferreira da Silva in mind, as difference through governed or regulated separability in evisceration of "difference without separability" or otherwise cosmologies predicated on a physics of entanglement or entangled matter(ing).[45]

In this regard, the first question at the heart of this book is simply, *What is religion*? As I hope these introductory remarks are starting to make clear, my aim is to break a certain common sense around religion. Specifically, I aim to clarify religion's invented status within a colonial and capitalist cosmology of separability and how that invented status is bound to the individuated or atomistic (anti)blackening of matter, which is further related both to the violent (anti) blackening of the people who have come to be called *black people* and to the violent enclosure through colonization and settler colonialism of the earth itself. In short, what I bring into view is religion, or more accurately race-religion or even still, if I may, racereligion (these terms are of a piece; to say one is already to be saying the other), as a construct or a technology of enclosing the earth through a brutalizing political-theological and cosmological imagination that alchemizes matter by extractively (anti)blackening it, subjecting it to brutalizing logics and practices of property ownership and (also as) separability. This imagination of matter, again in connection with the invention of religion, is bound up with "the human" that has emerged as religion's complement. A central claim of this book is that animating the multilayered "pandemics" of the COVID-19 virus, the virus of antiblackness, the virus of gun violence, and the virus of the political (including but not limited to neofascist authoritarianisms) that constricts the potentials of sociality or togetherness with each other and with the earth through a statist "we" (the "we" in "We the People") that is constituted through race-gender and through capitalism—animating this is the modern invention of religion and the human. I begin unraveling this problem by engaging in what I call *the black study of religion*, a new mode of the critical study of religion that with this book I want to begin advancing. That is, I subject religion to black study, revealing the modern (re)invention of religion to be an idea of enclosure.

What distinguishes *the black study* of religion from simply religious or theological studies? Well, on the one hand, the black study of religion discloses the anthropological significance of religion's invention. In this regard, it shows religion's invention as bound up with a newly emergent imagination of "the human" as a technology of atomization. The emergence of the Atlantic World of commerce and exchange is ground zero here (see chapters 2 and, especially, 3 of this book). This is where and when "the human" emerges as a religio-political construct or as a construct of political theology meant to cohere or bind certain

groups of people together over against others even as the former are in exploitative dependence on the latter. This operation of cohering is a religious one. One important meaning of *religion* (from the Latin verb *religare*, from which derives the word *religio*, a word introduced by Cicero) is "to bind together" and even obligate under law. *Religio* binds together a "we," often over against a "them." Religion, we might then say, emphasizing precisely its verb quality, "we's." It is an activity of we-ing, though that we-ing is premised on a first maneuver of antagonistically separating, atomizing, dividing, or individuating those in right standing (before the law, as citizens before the state, etc.) from those without such standing. And yet that very we-ing, the very constructing of a "we" for those of or within the walled-in polis, the city-state, is always already fraught, always already under duress, suffering a Sturm und Drang from a would-be, threatening outside, often when that outside shows up internally on the inside, thus getting read as a destabilizing threat to the normative We (the People), the state. That is, the we-ing that is an operation of religion and that is also and as such a practice of the political (and here we already see that religion is not just what happens in formal religious institutions, like churches and the like) is always already working against and in light of its own incoherence and instability. I speak of incoherence here in that the imagination of a pure "I" or a pure, as in racially pure, "we" over against a contaminating "them" cannot hold in the face of the entanglement that is the very condition of matter(ing) as such. Here entanglement is at once a matter of the social and of physics. It is a matter of sociophysics. I have in mind contemporary quantum physics coupled with the ancient poetic philosophy and the materially scientific imagination advanced by Lucretius in *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*), and this further linked with the kind of black feminist *mater*ialism we get with Denise Ferreira da Silva and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson. There are additional connections between the rethinking of matter I am exploring here through the black study of religion and the rethinking of matter in feminist science studies, as, for example, in the work of Karen Barad, and the rethinking of matter in terms of flesh that can be found in certain quarters of queer theory and trans studies, as, for example, in the work of C. Riley Snorton, Gayle Salamon, and Paul Preciado, whose work I've already noted.[46] With this series of connections in mind, (socio)physics proves to be (socio)poetics. This is a mysticism of sociality or a poetics of the social in which matter must be understood without time or beyond the time of the (racial capitalist) world insofar as the world is not enough.[47] As a function, then, of black studies, the black study of religion studies this operation of a capitalistic, individuating we-ing as one in which as a feat of violence "Western civilization"

works to sustain itself against an outside that it at once extracts from and depends on precisely to produce itself.

Additionally, and on the other hand, the black study of religion reveals religion's early modern invention as having yet-reverberating ecological significance. It shows religion's (re)invention to be bound up with a problematic imagination of matter in which the earth itself, its material stuff-ness or its very thingliness, is believed to be ownable or in which an extractive logic of property governs one's orientation toward the earth. Within this imagination of matter, there are those who believe themselves to be the owners of the right to ownership, and there are others who are on the underside of this believed right to ownership. The latter are in that group of things called *property*.[48] The former are bodies of credit, the latter of debt, figures that are owned and the embodiment of what is owed. This is an adumbration of John Locke's seventeenth-century settler colonial philosophy of property.[49] Locke's got us all locked up. But before Locke, what makes the world of transatlantic commerce and exchange in its fifteenth-century emergence crucial for understanding this problem is that it is where modern religion was invented to grant philosophical, political, and sexuated coherence (though it was always a coherence fraught with incoherence) to this way of conceiving the earth, extracting from it, and operating on it. The effort to cohere or establish a modern, free self—politically, this self has taken the form of the proper citizen of the state; economically, this free self is in the form of the consumer, who more historically has been both a buyer and seller of goods even when those goods have been the enslaved; and, philosophically, this free self has been figured as enlightened, self-possessed, and rational man—is what generates the global idea of race and the religious imagination that sustains it. To be of this (racial capitalist) world is to be within the invention of religion, within this enclosure invented as part of the enclosing of the earth. It is to be within that anthropological enclosure called *Man*, perhaps even *the human*. The secularism that marks us cannot evade this, for, indeed, secularism alas is a function of the Christian invention of religion, its binary complement that disavows its fraternal twin.[50] If anything, it's precisely this secularist belief in a rational overcoming of religion that further fuels the very invention of religion and its internal imagining of matter and (anti)blackening of the earth that I study in this book. As a poet once put it, "I ran from it and was still in it."[51]

The question becomes, Might there be a way "to be *still*—in it"? To ex-ist and sub-sist, to be otherwise—in it, beyond it? To escape, I mean ex-cape—in it? To be ecstatic, in a rupturing rapture—in it? What of the Real, I mean the Surreal—in it? Indeed, what of this *it*? Even more, what of the "loophole of retreat," Harriet

Jacobs might ask, the fugitive fold—within it?[52] These are questions not so much about the it but of the it within the it, what one of the figures in poet Nathaniel Mackey's *Mu* poem calls "the it of it"—in it.[53] It's this other it, this otherwise it, that has my attention. What's the state of that it, the other it spoken of in Mackey's poem as "the it of it"? What of this alternate atmosphere, this existence in crossing, in passage, at the crossroads, this other thinking and knowing, this other writing, this other theorizing, shall we say, that's out of this world because it signals some other relation to Earth, some other way of being with the earth? Could this be "the it of it"?[54] Might "the it of it" be what Mackey has also called "destination out" from within it, an outdoors and an outside to it (maybe that's it), even if that outside of it, that outdoors of it—let's call this other it the mystic it—is on or from the inside of modernity understood as religio-racial enclosure? Might there be some other im/possible, perhaps apophatic orientation of being and knowing beyond racial hierarchy and epistemology that strictly speaking in its mu-sicality, and muse-icality, and mysticality and (rh)ythmology is irreducible to religion but that nevertheless presents itself in relationship to what is now rather commonsensically, rather reflexively spoken of as *religion*? What if this is black religion, what black religion signals?

Black Radicalism's Spiritual Vocation

This brings me to what I take up in chapters 4 and 5, or what amounts to part II of this book. While the black study of religion introduces a new mode of the "critical study of religion," more important, the black study of religion, through its consideration of black religion, suggests an alternate, entangled way of being with the earth and of being always already differentially entangled with each other, some alternate mode of life together. What I'm after here by way of the black study of religion is an otherwise we. This other, nonindividuated we-ness opens onto an alternate imagination of matter(ing), an alternate, black *mater*iality, an erotic ~~meta~~physics as erotic cosmology of flesh announced within the poetics of black thought. I'm interested in the apophatic, that is, the unrepresentable that presents itself, the apophatic saying of the unsayable that constantly undoes all saying because there's always more to be said, always more and less. I'm interested in the parareligious (by which I mean the "it of it") that exceeds the marks, the letters, and thus the iconographic regime of the law of religion, and its twin, the law of secularism. In chapters 4 and 5, this is precisely what I take up—a thinking of and from within this alternate matter-ing, where such mattering suggests a distinct cosmology of entangled aliveness, of entangled togetherness, that alternative we-ness that we might call *sociality in the flesh*, *sociality in*

black. In this alternate we-ness, existence (or be-*ing*) generatively begins and ends with the generosity of entanglement, not with the presumptive logics and violent practices of individualized separability—the logics and practices that power the cosmology of (racial) capitalism.

To reiterate, (racial) capitalism is premised on a cosmology, indeed on a (rather curtailed or imperially short-circuited) *mythos* or mythology. It enacts an origin myth, an *archē* premised on separability. By contrast, the alternative operates an-archically, in apposition to the *archē* of racially gendered, racially sexuating capitalism. Thus, anarchy as alternative signals other socialities, other solidarities, some other solidness, the potentials of an alternate unfinishable-we, an always incomplete-we, within which any "I" is similarly incomplete and uncompletable, rooted in an alternate cosmology that points to that sprawling, swerving, and untouchable Silence that conditions all touch. This is matter as the rhythm of things. In her arresting book *M Archive: After the End of the World*, poet and self-described love evangelist Alexis Pauline Gumbs speaks of this cosmology in terms of a "black feminist metaphysics," indeed, as an alternate "mythology" that "[re-rhythms] everything" from the celestial to the oceanic, from the cosmic to the quantum, in light of "the infinite face of the deep."[55] Here we move beyond the differentiating rhythm of market value(s), the rhythm of separation for purposes of extractive enclosure, to some other modality of the sacred and the social or the sacrality of the social on the far side of the reigning *archē*, or what Cedric Robinson called "the terms of order" and "authority," to which he counterposed "the principle of incompleteness."[56]

What Robinson referred to as the principle of incompleteness in *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (1980), he would not long thereafter in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) align with the cosmological orientations one finds in obeah, in Haitian Voodoo, in hoodoo in parts of the southern United States, in Jamaican myalism, in Trinidadian shango, and the like. These practices drew on the materials of nature (roots, vegetation, etc.) to produce medicines and other concoctions for curing and healing.[57] But even more, these root work practices offered "ritualistic links . . . with the spirit world beyond the shadows and the sacred trees."[58] What Robinson has his finger on is an alternate worlding beyond the racial-colonial idea(l) of "the world as such." Laying this out fittingly in a section of *Black Marxism* titled "The Roots of the Black Radical Tradition"—which in my own thinking I've come to annotate as "The Root Work of the Black Radical Tradition"—Robinson understands this black radical worlding as premised on "a mystical sense of continuity between the living, the dead, and those yet to be born."[59] Here we find, as scholar Lindsey Stewart puts it, a "privileging of the relationship to the dead

over our relation to the slave owner or oppressor. . . . The oppressor's authority is demoted in this transaction, for our power resides in proper relation to the spirit inhabiting the *nkisi* [the ritual object]. In this instance, root work offers an independent means of evaluating the world not by reacting to (or directly challenging) the views of the dominant world, but by proactively offering values through the observation of specific forms of piety toward the prior and ongoing religious beliefs of our ancestors."[60] In Robinson's terms, what this points to is the "magic" of social change, where that magic has manifested historically in slave rebellions and marronage. Often vilified in the racial regime of the master class as witchcraft and sorcery because of its threat to their authority and to the king's authority, that is to say (to put it in the terms of this book), because of its would-be anarchism, this magic registers an alternate materiality of the social. It registers other ways of being with the earth and with each other. In this way, this alternate materiality operates at the crossroads and hosts its own crossroads mode of being and knowing. It offers a thinking in passage, a thinking in crossing, wherein passage and crossing, transitioning and the crossroads, are themselves an alternate source and resource (as I elaborate in chapter 5 of this book) of life and aliveness. In short, the crossroads is really a cosmological crosscurrent that operates anterior to and for this reason against the grain of the racial hierarchy and thus the sovereignty of colonial rule.

Both the "anarchy" and the "mystic song" that title this book are of this crossroads *mater*ialism of incompleteness, this otherwise cosmology. They are of the antepolitical alternative. Which is to say, they are of the radically or unstately or surreally antepolitical alternative that is in the tradition of refusal taken up in fugitivity and marronage. Of a piece with each other, anarchy and mysticism are of some other "knowledge of freedom."[61] Indeed, they signal an alternative atmospherics of the uncanny, the nonrepresentable, or what operates outside property's protocols of ownership. Charles Long mobilizes the ellipsis—the dot-dot-dot (. . .) that represents in writing what exceeds representation, the nonpunctuating punctuation mark, as Jennifer DeVere Brody has put it—as a figure of such anarchy, indeed, of what is called *black religion*.[62] In this sense, anarchy is mystically elliptical. A figure of the mysticality, the *mater*ialism, or the matter of blackness, ellipsis or anarchy bespeaks a poethics of disordered love beyond the terms or the grammar of order. Which is also to say that the anarchy that I begin elaborating in this book points to the spiritual vocation of the black radical tradition, to the prayer internal to this tradition. Beyond critique, this book is about that vocation.

Speaking of prayer and black radicalism's spiritual vocation, I would like to offer one final example to round out this introduction before offering a general

summary of the chapters and thus the road ahead. That example comes from Frantz Fanon. But this is a different Fanon than typically is thought about. I'm interested in Fanon's prayer, for it may be that there's something to be gleaned toward an unstately, a nonstatist postcoloniality, one that is truly decolonial from the horizon of (his) prayer. Maybe with and beyond Fanon himself, we can hear again *Black Skin, White Masks*' concluding words. They are words of apocalypse, an unveiling that reveals the book to have already been an elliptically open prayer that destabilizes phenomenology's (Kantian) idea of the subjective consciousness even as Fanon invokes that very idea in his closing words only to cause the very idea of closed consciousness to creak under the weight of blackness, which is to say, under the weight of incompleteness. By the end of the book, we discover that *Black Skin, White Masks* is a book filled not so much with a set of declarations or predications. Rather, we discover it to have been an open-ended, incomplete meditation of which the last lines are just that, its last but not final words. Those words he calls prayer:

> At the end of this book we would like the reader to feel with us the open dimension of every consciousness.
>
> My final prayer:
>
> O my body, always make me a man who questions![63]

These lines suggest that *Black Skin, White Masks* is itself perhaps a prayer book, the last line of it being a final prayer. What's cool and provocative about this is that it suggests, notwithstanding Fanon's humanism or his own sometimes one-dimensional interpretation of blackness that tends to come through as a certain pathologization of blackness, that *Black Skin* has another side to it. That other side announces itself through and as prayer. Figuring himself as one involved in prayer, indeed, figuring his psychoanalytically inflected analysis of the case of blackness within the horizon of prayer understood as a potential orientation outside of racial capitalist ontology, Fanon may be understood as more than the typically received Fanon. This is a Fanon of black religion as I am positing it and studying it in this book. This is a Fanon who prays. Which is to say, this is a Fanon against Fanon, a Fanon who from within the very terms of "the human" produced through antiblackness is dis/oriented toward the open, toward *the it of it*, toward *that within* that exceeds the reigning terms of "the human," even while Fanon directs his prayer to a god-object (what he called "my body" as object of possession) and within a humanist teleology (what Fanon figures as the realization of a certain manhood).[64] What has my attention here is not per se this set of problems, which in another context might be more fully addressed and dealt with. Rather, riveting my attention is the fact of prayer as bound up with the

fact of blackness, the case of prayer as part of the case of blackness. What has my attention is that prayer would dare appear within *Black Skin, White Masks*, that Fanon would dare pose *Black Skin, White Masks* as (a) prayer. What could be the possible significance of this?

I propose that if we can think a Fanon in the direction of the black study of prayer, this being an aspect of the black study of religion, indeed of black study, as I am proposing in this book; that is, if we can think prayer in the direction of incompleteness rather than as commerce between hierarchically distinguished sovereign subjects (a "God" who lords or masters over a creature); if we can think prayer as a practice of and toward the open, practice without telos or a regulatory endgame, without sovereignty, as a practice of insovereign incompletion, as improper, anarchic refusal of stateliness, propriety, property, and the proper and thus as registering an alternate imagination of matter as sheer, indeterminate, congregate swerving (something akin to what Lucretius proposed in *De rerum natura*)—if we can go in this direction, which seems to be a subterranean impulse in the Fanonian text, we can then think a Fanon for whom prayer is dis/orientation, indeed, an open set of practices that signals indeterminate *mater*iality, unstately sociality, and disidentification with religion as individuating force. At that point, something like black religion, turned in the direction that I've been suggesting in this introduction and that I more fully adumbrate in the chapters that follow, marks the decolonial text. In short, black religion then shows up, para-Fanon-like, as religion's disidentified, dis/oriented, its queer, uncanny, afro-surreal, its "mad" and "maddening" (in that sense that La Marr Jurelle Bruce talks about), its "atheological" (in that sense that Ashon Crawley but also Georges Bataille talks about), its hoodoo'ed and voodoo'ed, its anguished yet joyous, its limboed yet celebratory outside (as Lindsey Stewart, following Zora Neale Hurston, elaborates).[65] It shows up as black radical, parareligious creativity, as religion's (black) outdoors, as that "collective craft" of poetic living.[66]

Mindful of this, this book, which is perhaps my own sacrilegious prayer book, aims then to release black religion from the byways of the study of church history and denominational or cultic distinctions in order to reveal *black religion* as a term through which to reckon with black radicalism's spiritual, which is to say, its *mater*ial, vocation. That vocation is linked to an alternative imagination of matter and operates as an insurgency at the site of the modern invention of religion itself. So understood, *black religion* anagrammatizes *religion*. This book is about that anagram, that scrambling, that hieroglyph, that "ideogram," as Long once called it, that cosmogram.[67] It's about (the blackness of) black religion in its nonreduction to racial-religious enclosure. It is an invitation into the study of an expansive, alternate cosmology, a cosmopoetic, anarchic "we" that does

not need an externalized, individuated, or otherized "them" to establish itself. Indeed, such a "we" exceeds and refuses establishment.

The Road Ahead

There are five chapters in this book. In chapter 1, "Black (Feminist) Anarchy," I think principally with film scholar and queer-of-color theorist Kara Keeling and philosopher and literary theorist Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, while in chapter 2, "The Matter of Anarchy," and chapter 3, "Anarchy and the Fetish," I engage theorist of religion and scholar of black religion Charles Long. Across these three chapters, I explore the problem of the (anti)blackening of matter by way of the black study of religion and in the interest of setting up a consideration of black religion as made up of practices premised on an alternate imagination of matter. My aim is to elaborate black religion as a sociophysics of difference without separability. More specifically, across chapters 1–3, I introduce what I call *the black study of religion* to address antiblackness as religion or as a material cosmology built on the principle (*archē*) of the (anti)blackening of matter. This (anti)blackening, which entails both matter's epidermalization and its transubstantiation into property, is built on the would-be evisceration of black *mater* or the maternal as a generative, erotic depth that imbues matter, giving matter in-finiteness or its capacity to ongoingly regenerate itself as flows of entangled difference out of the cycle of dying and living. This cycle is matter. In chapter 1, I follow Keeling and Jackson in considering how *mater* as matter, as matter's *mater*ial depth, was targeted in matter's (anti)blackening, in the (anti)blackening of now-black(ened) people, and in the making of "this world" or in the establishing of a cosmology of racial capitalism. I am keenly interested in chapter 1 in Keeling's and Jackson's pinpointing of a logic of religion internal to the making of "this world" or the (anti)blackening of matter and, indeed, the (anti)blackening of the earth. In chapters 2 and 3, I think with and build from the work of Charles Long to continue the direction of thinking begun in chapter 1 with Keeling and Jackson. The upshot of these chapters is to offer an account of the modern invention of religion as predicated on enclosing and extracting from the earth, on enclosing and extracting from black *mater* as matter, in short, on eviscerating matter's depth and foreclosing on alternate cosmologies or imaginations of matter(-ing), particularly, those advancing incompleteness.

Chapters 4 ("The Anarchy of Black Religion") and 5 ("Anarchy Is a Poem, Is a Song . . .") may be considered part II of the book and also the book's most speculative and experimental part. Here, beyond the analysis and critique of the cosmology of racial capitalism and the antiblackening of matter as developed

in chapters 1–3, I think the alternative of black *mater* as mattering otherwise in incompleteness via what has been called black religion. I argue that what is called black religion is not just a species of religion in blackface. No. What is called black religion is part and parcel of blackness as incompletion and a signal of matter's re-generative indeterminacy. This alternate mattering may be understood, after theologian and scholar of religious ethics Victor Anderson, as predicated on blackness's "divine grotesqueries," that is, on a blackness "beyond ontological Blackness."[68] To understand blackness as an alternative cosmology of matter-ing, to understand it in terms of the black *mater*nal, which as Keeling notes may have a certain relationship to those identified as "black women" but is not simply and reductively equatable with those so designated (see chapter 1), is to understand blackness as more than "a blackness that whiteness created," as Anderson puts it, more than blackness reduced to racial category or within ontology.[69] As a cosmology of entanglement or entangled matter-ing, blackness signals what may be thought of as that spiritual vocation of an alternative we-ness, an alternative sociality with the earth and cosmos and therefore each other.[70] In chapters 4 and 5, I fill this out by thinking again with scholar of black religion Charles Long and poet, novelist, and essayist Nathaniel Mackey.

Specifically, chapter 4 explores the alternative sociality and practice of the sacred talked about above through Long's notion of ellipsis, the dot-dot-dot (. . .), or the punctuation mark that signals when something is left out or indicates that more is to be said though that more exceeds saying. I reflect on ellipsis as a figure of (the blackness of) black religion by attending to the mathematics internal to Long's notion of ellipsis, for ellipse is eclipsed within ellipsis. More specifically, I inquire into black religion in the dark zone, in the void, in the eclipsed (non)space between ellipse and ellipsis. This, then, is a mathopoetics of black religion. It is here that I most fully develop the idea of anarchy (*an-archē*) as a parareligious impulse of elliptical unfinishedness internal to black social life.

Chapter 5 builds on this account of the anarchy of black religion from chapter 4 through a consideration of Nathaniel Mackey's practice of the poem. The claim I advance in this chapter is that Mackey's practice of the poem is an example precisely of the account of black religion that I start to develop through engaging Long's poetics of religion. Might it be that the black experimental arts host the cosmology of mattering otherwise, the understanding of (the blackness of) black religion that in thinking with Long (and others) I am elaborating? Chapter 5 on Mackey's practice of the poem—and indeed this book as a whole—explores an answer of yes to this question. More specifically, with chapter 4 on Long's mathopoetics of ellipsis as a figure of black religion, this chapter on Mackey's practice of the poem advances a poetics of black religion or an exploration of the

spiritual as *mater*ial vocation of the black radical tradition as it operates at the site of language. Indeed, between chapters 4 and 5, I bring into view a nonsettler understanding of the holy, of Silence, of the sacred—a kind of black radical sacrality—as bound up with the *mater*ial profaneness, the undergroundedness, the earthly fundament of blackness. This black earthiness that also bespeaks the blueness of ocean and sky, sea and heavens, I explore under the banner of anarchy as constant origination, constant re-generation without origin, unending beginningness. I'm speaking here of the mysticality of blackness or of blackness as a mode of mysticism manifest in the aesthetics of social practice. What has been called black religion is of this aesthetic practice; there is a (para)religiosity to the "aesthetic sociology of Blackness," to "black gathering," in quantum assembly.[71] With Mackey, this book travels the pathway of poetry, culminating in a line of verse, a song. And so this book along with being perhaps a sacrilegious prayer book is also and as such a (prose) poem, a (mystic) song.

When all of this is added up, what I present here is the scaffolding of a new approach to black religion. I use the word *new* haltingly, especially given how the university or the regime of academe is so committed to the new as a species of ownership whereby *Homo academicus* as a species of "the human" establishes academic ownership, possession, and prowess. I'm under no illusions: I'm a part of the academic colonial machine, the religious studies machine even. And yet I see this work as trying to break that machine or at least put a spoke in its wheels through the black study of religion. That is, this work is both more and less than one. "I" may have written this book, but I certainly don't own it. In fact, the writerly "I"—the "author"—is here under pressure. I'm under pressure inasmuch as this book is, I hope, a beautiful mess of entanglements. It is an instance of the very crossroads practices of way making that I am trying to get some traction in thinking about under the sign of blackness and black religion, under the sign of the blackness of black religion. This book, then, is itself a practice of black *mater* as matter's differential performance. This book is a larger conversation, and insofar as that conversation is ongoing and incomplete, so too is this book. Thus, what presents itself here are traces of conversations with many interlocutors—some directly as friends, comrades, and colleagues; others more indirectly through their scholarship and writing—who have helped me think about what here I've shorthanded as *the anarchy of black religion*. In this important sense, I claim no newness at all. I only hope to participate in a renewal of an assembly that racial capitalism from the jump aimed to interdict. In this respect, what I claim is having already been claimed inside of a certain sharing; I claim a certain apprenticeship to a field of study, to black study. And yet what perhaps is new in this book, at least somewhat, is the religious studies sensibility that

animates it through a method that I call *the black study of religion.* I bring this method of inquiry to bear on black studies or African diaspora studies to address or bring more explicitly to the fore the spiritual as material vocation of this tradition. In other words, this book brings together black religious studies, on the one hand, and Africana, African diaspora, and African American studies, on the other, within a single theoretical constellation, believing that thinking through the blackness of black religion mutually theorizes black religion and blackness.

Notes

AN ANARCHIC INTRODUCTION

1 Daniel Hodges, testimony, July 27, 2021, in a US congressional hearing into the January 6, 2020, insurrection, quoted in Gonzalez, "D.C. Officer."

2 For more on the "religion of whiteness," see Carter, *Religion of Whiteness*. This is the book that I interrupted in a writing frenzy whose result is the book you are now reading.

3 Du Bois, "Souls of White Folk," 56. This statement is part of Du Bois's account of "this new religion of whiteness" that is "dashing . . . on the shores of our time." In developing his argument, he performs the rhetorical cadence of the King James Bible, writing, "I do not laugh. I am quite straight-faced as I ask soberly: 'But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?'" Answering, he responds to his own question, "Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" (56).

4 On the distinctive American Protestantism of the locking up of religion into the frameworks of church or even cultic histories and the insufficiency—indeed, the failures—of such approaches, see Sidney Mead, *Lively Experiment*. What Mead reveals, in crucial respects beyond the avowed intentions of his book, is that church historical and doctrinal frameworks derived from Old World Europe are insufficient to understanding the phenomenon of American religion because the effort to do so masks deeper settler colonial rationalities. Differently put, they mask settler statecraft as itself a practice of political theology. Whatever the other limitations of Mead's book might be, this insight alone put his 1963 book at the vanguard of the new direction regarding the study of religion as bound up with settlerism. In many respects, this direction in scholarship is only now beginning to come into its own.

5 A. Butler, *White Evangelical Racism*.

6 On the "afterlife of slavery," see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*. Thinking with Hartman, Matthew Elia develops the notion of the "afterlife of the master" in his article "Ethics in the Afterlife of Slavery." He more fully develops it in *The Problem of the Christian Master*.

7 This phrase is the subtitle of Hendricks's *Christians against Christianity*.

8 Wimbush, *White Men's Magic*.

9 In speaking of "love improper," I am reading Eddie Glaude's and R. A. Judy's accounts of James Baldwin with and against the grain of each other. Judy's account of Baldwin can be

found in the last chapter of his erudite and pathbreaking book, *Sentient Flesh*. Of course, what sets Glaude's and Judy's Baldwins apart is that the latter's Baldwin is located much more within the context of third worldism and thus within a radical ante- (and not just anti-) Americanism. Which is to say, Judy's Baldwin is quite unstately. He is an avatar of what might be called *unstately black religion*—indeed, of the anarchy of black religion.

The example to which Judy turns to exemplify what he means is the mutual engagement, while Baldwin was in Paris, between Baldwin and the Algerian-born French novelist Nabile Farès. Judy tracks the interlocutions between the two writers, with his attention riveted to Farès's on the significance of Baldwin's writings, why he's moved by them. Specifically, Farès is taken with what he discerns as Baldwin's "rejection of integration qua assimilation as a prerequisite for social justice and freedom" (432). The rejection that Farès picks up on in Baldwin's writings, Farès interprets as the "OUTLANDISH hope" of "a life ARTISTICALLY LIVED" (430). Only such an outlandishly artistic life "can yield any meaning, or give evidence of meaning other than that of political slavishness," which is to say, other than being enthralled by or held captive "to the reigning political line" or reasons of state (430). But this is possible only because at the heart of such poetic or artistic living is a specific mode of being, to wit, "black being," where "black being is a being-on-the-line" (433). Such being is being in exposure or "in ruination without [recourse to] any mitigating redemptive metaphysics or theology" (433). This includes the redemptive metaphysics that comes with and through Christianization as stately Americanization or as assimilation into the body politic as a citizen. Which is to say, the Christianization as the Americanization of the black, the imposition of a burdened individuality of freedom upon the Negro to remake the Negro into the would-be African American, is nothing less than a soteriological operation. It is a feat of political theology by any measure, be it Schmittian or otherwise. Instead, in Baldwin's wake and in the wake of a certain reading of the term *Middle Passag*e, Judy proposes an understanding of black being as otherwise to political theology and its redeeming of sacrifice, its logics of redemptive sacrifice for the eschatological salvation of the settler nation-state. As being-on-the-line, black being

> is emergent with the separation of space and time from the everyday practice of living and from each other that occurred in the Guineaman's hold—the architecture of which purposefully aimed at smeltering the preexistent formations of the enslaved's socialities, in order to extract from them dynamic human energy, which, liquefied, is poured into the capitalist mold of the Negro as exchangeable labor-property, where it resolidifies as such. Black being is being in ruination because the smeltering is imperfect. There are elements from before in the fluidity, cannot be expelled, or melted away, which have enough residual cohesion to be manifest in the solidified form. That cohesion in liquefaction is black being; which, neither reducible to the Negro or any longer circumscribed by the preexistent formations, is being on the line of animality and humanity, and so, perpetually exhibiting the material processes of harmonization, without requiring the veneer or conceit of civilization as the legitimation of violent carnage. (433–34)

Much of what Judy says here under the inspiration of Baldwin's and Farès's engagements with each other I explore across chapters 1 to 3 of this book as I think with and between black feminist theory via Kara Keeling's and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's work and via

Charles H. Long's work on alchemy, the fetish, and the problem of religion. We'll get to that. For now, what has my attention is Judy's Baldwin-inflected, radicalized thinking about the politicality, if we can even call it that, of black being on the line and in ruination. I say "if we can even call it that" because what Judy's Baldwin proposes is not so much a theological or eschatological redeeming of the political and thus a redeeming of America via the sacrifice of black people, nor is it a bringing-together of the cross and the lynching tree. Rather, he offers something much more akin to a revolutionary ante-politicality that emerges artistically, poetically, and cosmologically on the farside of settler politicality and thus on the farside of the political as we know it, on the farside, rhythmically and stylistically, of political theology.

It is this beyond, this farside, that Farès heard in Baldwin-as-artist. He heard in Baldwin's bluesy artistry black being-on-the-line, which entails being-in-common. Such being-in-common has no truck with the logics of individuation or the bordered separability that drives modern statecraft and that's internal to the figure of the citizen as political avatar of the properly human. Here, the state and the citizen, as figures of bordering, are premised on property logics, which have legitimated the theft of land and life and attendant practices and discourses of (settler) sovereignty. Baldwin's name for the artistic alternatives of poetic living as being-in-common is *nonexclusionary love* or what Judy calls "love improper." Love is what is revolutionarily anterior to, what is anarchically on the farside of, political theology's stately machinations. Such love is political to the extent that it revolutionarily undoes rather than reforms the political. It is such practices of love in refusal of and, at some base level, fugitive from theological capture that marks black being as a mystic song.

10 Long, "Understanding Religion and Its Study." Because of its centrality both for Long and for my own engagement with it, I leave *archē* italicized throughout this book.

11 I borrow this formulation from scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackson. I think extensively with Jackson (and Kara Keeling) in chapter 1 of this book. For now and in the interest of elaborating on this phrase, "the world as such," and how I do not take "the world" as given, I here further reference Jackson. With this phrase her focus is on

> the particular problem of the definite article "the," as a qualifier of "world." In light of the work of Quentin Meillasoux and other realist approaches to "world" and anti-correlationalist stances (i.e., some new materialist approaches), I have argued for a disenchantment of the idea(l) of "the world" as a knowable concept, while holding on to the notion of incalculable and untotalizable worldings. "The world," and especially "the world as such," I argue, fails as a concept (at knowability) but succeeds as an idea(l) of imperialist myth predicated on the absent presence of what I call the black *mater*(nal). This critique is not limited to any particular representation of "the world" but is a rejection of the concept of "the world." (Z. Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 230n11)

On the world as conceptual idea(l), see also Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist.* I am quite in agreement with Jackson's take on the problem of "the world" as rooted in imperialist myth or, as I argue here, as lodged in the problem of modernity's (re)invention of religion and extractive (anti)blackening of the earth. It is this imperialist idea(l) of "the world" and a concomitant understanding of the political that has been imposed on top of the earth. I should also note, Jackson's argument about "the world as such" as "an idea(l)

of imperialist myth" resonates with the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva, whose presence courses through the pages of this book.

12 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being."

13 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; and Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

14 The notion of refusal beyond resistance runs through my attempt to understand black religion as practices of endurance in opacity. I've found quite helpful cultural anthropologist Carole McGranahan's take on refusal, its relatedness to resistance, and its being about more than just resisting or saying no to domination. See McGranahan, "Theorizing Refusal." She observes that "to refuse is to say no. But, no, it is not just that. To refuse can be generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another. Refusals illuminate limits and possibilities, especially but not only of the state and other institutions. And yet, refusal cannot be cast merely as a response to authority, or an updated version of resistance, or a concept to subsume under already existing scholarly categories" (319). If refusal is not merely negative or oppositional, if it is not just to say no, then how to think about it? Refusal activates and summons or generates alternate socialities and possibilities. Referencing specifically Audra Simpson's work in indigenous and settler colonial studies and more specifically Simpson's analysis of Kahnawà:ke Mohawk refusals, McGranahan clarifies "that available concepts of resistance or recognition remain insufficient *in that they often overestimate the place of the state*" (322, emphasis added). In its unstateliness, "refusal . . . rejects external state and institutional structures. For the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk [as Simpson shows] this can be to call forward 'the prior,' that is, all that preceded, and desires now to succeed, settler colonialism. This stance challenges the presumption and enactment of inequity in, for example, state-society relations. If resistance involves consciously defying or opposing superiors 'in a context of differential power relationships' . . . , then refusal rejects this hierarchical relationship, repositing the relationship as one configured altogether differently" (322–23). I'm interested in "the prior" to "hierarchy" of which McGranahan, following Simpson, speaks. That is, I'm interested in that anterior to the *archē* in hierarchy, which links to the *an-* of anarchy. I want to think black religion in the mode of refusal. What if, strangely, black religion is the refusal of (the hier-*archē* of) religion (and the secular) that grounds the terms of order? (More on the significance of *archē* in short order.)

I must also say before concluding this endnote that McGranahan's account of refusal, which builds on Simpson's work, resonates with attention to refusal in black studies, which also informs my thinking on the topic. For example, Tina Campt posits refusal as "a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation, i.e., a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented" is in McGranahan's language not just to say no. Rather, the negation activates; it, Campt says, is "a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise." See Campt, "Black Visuality and the Practice of Refusal," 83. See as well the fantastic conversation on refusal between Hartman and Fred Moten, "To Refuse That Which Has Been Refused to You." Finally, I must mention the immensely illuminating and first-rate work of Lindsey Stewart on refusal as a practice of joy. See Stewart, *Politics of Black Joy*.

15 Freud, *Uncanny*.

16 See Long, "Freedom, Otherness, and Religion"; and Long, "Understanding Religion and Its Study."

17 On the reconfiguration of empire, see E. Edwards, *Other Side of Terror.*

18 This is a topic insightfully taken up in Rooks, *White Money/Black Power*; Ferguson, *Reorder of Things*; and Mitchell, "Diversity." Attention has yet to be given to the vital question of the emergence of the critical study of religion in the modern university (and thus outside of the often-confessional context of theological seminaries) through the emergence of "secular" religious studies departments in the 1960s and 1970s, at the same time that the birth of African American studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, and the like was also taking place in the modern university. There is something to be thought together about these two phenomena for how questions of religion function within the intramural and epistemological dynamics of these fields. In its own way, this was a topic that Long started to touch on as part of his work in the critical study of religion generally and in the study of black religion and black social life more specifically. See "The Chicago School: An Academic Mode of Being" and "The University, the Liberal Arts, and the Teaching and Study of Religion," both in Long, *Ellipsis*. . . .

19 Long works this out in several places across his expansive oeuvre, but consider particularly the section titled "The Black Reality: Toward a Theology of Freedom" in Long, "Interpretations of Black Religion in America." Consider also Long, "Oppressive Elements in Religion and the Religions of the Oppressed."

20 As a methodological point, I confess to taking liberties with Long precisely as part of my effort not so much to reproduce his thought as to think with him, while also doing my best to remain close to his approach. This, actually, is a point that holds for virtually all with whom I think, where thought itself is a space of commun(-ion)-ism, a vector of sociality. This practice has been called *study*, that "speculative social intellectual practice undertaken in the undercommons of, in defiance of, the university," as Erica Edwards (*Other Side of Terror*, 323n4) puts it, so nicely summarizing Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (*Undercommons*). In undercommoning with Long, which is to say, in being involved with him in the commun(-ion)-ism of black (religious) study and the black study of religion, my aim ultimately is not to secure his "meanings," if by that one means locking down his use of such concepts as *archē* and his late use of the notion *anarchy*. Rather, my approach to these two Longian notions—the former well developed; the latter emergent closer to the end of his life—is akin to Denise Ferreira da Silva's approach to and engagement with Hortense Spillers's notion of "the captive body," "skin color," and "flesh." See Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, and Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." About these, Ferreira da Silva says, "I am not taking [Spillers's] terms as concepts, which would presume both that they do comprehend (whatever they are applied to describe) and that their usage assures comprehensibility" (27n7). Similarly, my taking up after Long of *archē* and *anarchy* for an engagement with (the blackness of) black religion and for a more general engagement with the empire of religion and the secular is irreducible to conceptual lockdown. Instead, as Saidiya Hartman suggests in a statement that I've made the epigraph to this book, "'anarchism' [and by extension *anarchy*] is an open and incomplete word, and in this resides its potential." Hartman, "Foreword," xv–xvi. Its potential for what, one asks? Coming back to Ferreira da Silva, I respond, its potential for "[dissembling and disorganizing]

accounts of both racial and cisheteropatriarchal subjugation" precisely at the symbolic site of skin-colored race-gender within "the post-Enlightenment political architecture" (*Unpayable Debt*, 28) or the *archē* of the present, as I call it after Long. This then, in short, is an investigation of the racial-religious *archē* of modernity brought into view against the backdrop of the ana-conceptuality of anarchy (or *an-archē*). Put differently, my interest is in a parareligious poetics of anarchy. It is in anarchy as an open assemblage that constantly disassembles the *archē*-ological terms of order, the religio-secular "arrangement of the Colonial, the Racial, the Juridical (the State and Cisheteropatriarchy), and Capital at work in the global present" (28).

21 Long, "Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion," 167–68. See also Long, "Primitive/Civilized."

22 For an engagement with the full range of this term in Greek philosophy, see Gourgouris, "Archē." Besides Stathis Gourgouris's fuller arguments about *archē* in *The Perils of the One*, there are important considerations of *archē* to be found in Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Reiner Schürmann. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; and Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*. Finally, with the phrase *terms of order*, I do indeed mean to connect Long's considerations of *archē* and religion to Cedric Robinson, a key thinker within black studies and black radicalism who was also concerned with order. The suggestion here is that at the heart of black radicalism as a form of speculative study generally and of Robinson's oeuvre particularly is an investigation of the terms of religion, if not the term *religion*. See Robinson, *Terms of Order*.

23 Wynter and McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?"

24 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being." On Wynter's taking of Blumenberg's notion of "reoccupation" to understand raciality or the emergence of a global idea of race as a reoccupation of certain scholastic or medieval theological protocols, see Garba and Sorentino, "Blackness before Race and Race as Reoccupation."

25 On the problem of extraction as it relates to issues of energy sources and the making of present petroleum culture, see Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse*; Lord, *Art and Energy*; Rowe, *Of Modern Extraction*. Notwithstanding Ghosh's work, more work needs to be done that explores the connections between the rise of our current petroculture and practices of petrocapitalism, on the one hand, and racial capitalism, on the other. Fortunately, Macarena Gómez-Barris has jump-started this work. See Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zone*.

26 Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 13–14, and more generally chapter 1 of that book.

27 Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 15, 16.

28 On "collective preservation," see E. Edwards, *Other Side of Terror*, 20. On the maternal ecology, see Williamson, *Scandalize My Name*.

29 Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 78.

30 Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 273. See Long, "Silence and Signification," 66.

31 Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 273.

32 This is a good place to offer a statement about how I will render the word *blackness* (and *black*) throughout this book. Given how as a term *blackness* can have multiple senses—it can be a term of racial categorical denigration, a term that exceeds the racial and colonial freight loaded into it, or both of these all at once—there is a case to be made for capitalizing

Blackness or rendering it in lowercase as *blackness*. There is also a case to be made for going between uppercase and lowercase, depending on the sense of the term one wants to invoke in a particular instance. For the sake of making as smooth a reading experience as possible, I have decided to render *blackness* (and *black*) in lowercase throughout this book and will trust the reader to discern my sense of the term in the context of the specific argument or claim being made.

33 Despentes, "Preface," 17.

34 Preciado, *Apartment on Uranus*, 29.

35 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*; Du Bois, *Problem of the Color Line*; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; and Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*.

36 In addition to *Unpayable Debt* and its reflections on matter, see Ferreira da Silva, "1 (Life) / 0 (Blackness)."

37 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being"; Ferreira da Silva, "Before Man"; Ferreira da Silva, "Hacking the Subject"; and Z. Jackson, *Becoming Human*.

38 This account of the medieval as a temporal signifier but also an unrepresentable threshold that I'm aligning with mysticism and with blackness is indebted to a thinking with Aimé Césaire and literary scholar David Lloyd. See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*; Césaire, *Journal of a Homecoming;* and Lloyd, *Irish Times*.

39 See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

40 West, *Race Matters*.

41 Z. Jackson, *Becoming Human*.

42 On "Man 1" and "Man 2" and the Christian theological architecture of his production, see Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being." See also McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.

43 See both Echeverría, *Modernity and "Whiteness"*; and Carter, *Religion of Whiteness*.

44 Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; and Ferreira da Silva, "Hacking the Subject."

45 Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference without Separability."

46 See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; Salamon, *Assuming the Body*; Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*; Preciado, *Apartment on Uranus*; and Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*

47 My investment in ~~meta~~physics as poetics should be evident. But also, this book may be understood as informed by a turn to Lucretius in certain quarters of philosophy and classics. In other words, Lucretian naturalism and a certain black religious naturalism or a physics of blackness is also something that is emergent in this book. See Holmes, "Deleuze, Lucretius, and the Simulacrum of Naturalism"; Nail, *Lucretius I*; Nail, *Lucretius II*; Nail, *Lucretius III*; Nail, *Theory of the Earth*; and M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness*.

48 The literature on this is vast and growing, but particularly helpful are Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself*; Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*; Cervenak, *Black Gathering*; and Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*

49 See particularly Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*.

50 The literature on the (Christian) religiosity of secularism is growing. On the topic and drawing them into the context of the black study of religion, I am perhaps most in conversation with Gil Anidjar, Talal Asad, and Saba Mahmood. See Anidjar, "Secularism"; Anidjar, *Semites*; Anidjar, *Blood;* Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; and Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*.

51 Moten and Harris, *I Ran from It*.

52 The phrase *loophole of retreat* is the title of chapter 21 in Harriet Jacobs's 1861 slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In this chapter, Jacobs, writing under the name "Linda Brent," tells the story of her occupation for several years, as a runaway or fugitive slave, of an almost coffin-size attic or garret space atop a small shed. From this space she watched over her children until she could secure their freedom along with her own. See Jacobs, *Incidents*, 137–41.

53 From "Brother B's Rumpstruck Recital" in Mackey, *Nerve Church*, 30. Here's the fuller context of the "it of it" formulation in that poem:

> . . . Was it over
> now,
> we asked him, could you let go, let it go, be
> done with it, move on. He said he long since
> cut it loose but no way, we knew, could that
> be
> so . . . The tumbling out of it the it of it, the it
> of it going on. Was it love or the love song he
> cut loose but couldn't cut loose we wondered,
> an-
> other Anuncio in love with the sound or the
> song of it, barred entry but entranced. We wanted
> to know was it a state he would give it up for, some
> just and a joint array of others wanting voice, the
> we
> our cresting récit mused and made mention of,
> the we he'd make real we hoped. . . .

54 Z. Jackson, "'Theorizing in a Void.'" I first encountered the term *parareligion* from Justine Bakker in a Zoom conversation and then in an email exchange. To get some leverage on what *the black study of religion* might be about, I've recruited Bakker's term into my efforts, along with such ideas as paratheology and paraliturgy (Carter, "Paratheological Blackness"; Carter, "Excremental Sacred"), paraontology (Chandler, *X*) and its uptakes and extensions (by Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful"; and into "ante-ontology" by Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*), and parasemiosis (Judy, *Sentient Flesh*). I engage this mix of conceptual poeticisms in chapter 4 of this book.

55 Gumbs, *M Archive*, 100, 112.

56 Robinson, *Terms of Order*, 197.

57 Along with Long's "Bodies in Time and the Healing of Spaces," in thinking about this I have found exceptionally helpful Jaudon, "Obeah's Sensations"; Paton, "Obeah Acts"; and Rusert, "Plantation Ecologies."

58 Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 136, where he draws on Michael Craton's *Sinews of Empire* in advancing his argument.

59 Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 136, where he again references Craton's *Sinews of Empire*.

60 Stewart, *Politics of Black Joy*, 107.

61 See Moten, "Knowledge of Freedom."

62 Long, *Ellipsis . . .* (particularly, the introductory essay); and Brody, *Punctuation*, particularly ch. 2.

63 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 206.

64 Judy, *Sentient Flesh*; and Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."

65 Bruce, *How to Go Mad*; Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*; and Stewart, *Politics of Black Joy*. See as well what Georges Bataille called his "atheological summa" (that summa is composed of *Inner Experience*, *Guilty*, and *On Nietzsche*) and his "unfinished system of nonknowledge" (see *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*), both of which he saw as driven by incompleteness and as reframing what has been called *mysticism*, albeit without any "God" or stabilizing god-terms to otherwise complete it. "The Mystic Song" of this book's subtitle as well as the notion of "prayer" that I've just spoken of with respect to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and to anticolonialism and decolonialism more generally registers this as well.

66 E. Edwards, *Other Side of Terror*, 31. On life lived artistically or poetically, see Judy, *Sentient Flesh*.

67 Long, *Significations*, 9.

68 Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*.

69 Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 61.

70 Much of what I'm saying here is indebted to and in unending conversation with Fred Moten. See Moten, *Black and Blur*.

71 Cervenak, *Black Gathering*; L. Harris, *Experiments in Exile*; and Mackey, "Quantum Ghosts."

CHAPTER ONE. BLACK (FEMINIST) ANARCHY

Epigraphs: Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 155; Z. Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 211; and Z. Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 90–91.

1 Spillers, "Fabrics of History: Essays on the Black Sermon."

2 Sharpe, "Black Studies."

3 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 32.

4 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 32.

5 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 155.

6 This phrase, *the black study of religion*, is itself a gift of black study. More specifically, it emerged out of a quick flyby telephone conversation I was having with my ongoing intellectual collaborator in black study and sometimes writing partner, Sarah Jane Cervenak, who deployed this term in describing what I do. When she said it, I was like, "Damn, what'd you just say? . . . Thanks for that . . ."

7 Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 15. Within this quote, Nongbri's reference to a notion of religion as "simply there" draws from historian of comparative religion Eric J. Sharpe. However, Nongbri insists that this naturalist understanding of religion is not just a scholarly statement or an assumption among scholars. Rather, it distills a more popular or common-sense assumption about religion as a natural thing or, again, as "simply there." Nongbri interrogates and takes down this assumption, and across the pages of this book, I, too, interrogate and take it down, though giving more texture than Nongbri does to enslaving architectures internal to the production of religion as a colonial technology. That is,