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ELISABETH R. ANKER

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To the loves of my life:
Matthew, Daniel, Lilah

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introduction

Ugly Freedoms

DURING THE US WAR TO ANNEX THE PHILIPPINES, American soldiers employed a special method of torture against Filipino captives resisting US occupation. Standing on their arms to hold them in place, the soldiers thrust a running water hose down their captives' throats to simulate the feeling of drowning. This method, known as the "water cure," was intended to both punish individual insurgents and compel the larger Filipino population to submit to imperial occupation. When stories of the water cure returned to the US mainland, the technique was condemned as an obscene act abhorrent to American political values, and it was eventually prohibited. Yet for the soldiers on the ground, who continued to perform it, the water cure was viewed not as the opposite of American political values but as an expression of them. One soldier wrote a song, "The Water Cure in the P.I.," that expressed this view:

> Get the good old syringe boys and fill it to the brim
> We've caught another nigger and we'll operate on him
> Let someone take the handle who can work it with a vim
> Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom.
>
> Hurrah. Hurrah. We bring the Jubilee.
> Hurrah. Hurrah. The Flag that Makes him free.

Shove the nozzle deep and let him taste of liberty,
Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom.[1]

In this song, torture is a battle cry of freedom. It is a jubilee celebration—a joyful and world-historic liberation—best practiced by an enthusiastic torturer, someone "who can work it with a vim." Water is transformed into an instrument of torture by the syringe nozzle, and in this form it provides a "taste of liberty." According to the song's sadistic lyrics, once water is forced into Filipinos, it *becomes* liberty—it is what liberty tastes like for the tortured subject. Freedom, for Filipino captives, is experienced sensorially as drowning by torture. This practice of freedom targets the subject of a violent racial slur, so it draws on and extends long-standing American patterns of racialized violence against nonwhite people. Deployed at home against Black and Native peoples, this brutality is now projected abroad against the people of the Philippines, newly designated as subjects of American racial empire.[2] The song's imperative to "shove the nozzle deep" sexualizes the violence that marks the water cure as a form of control akin to rape. Freedom for the Filipinos challenging US occupation means being subjected to torture, and freedom for white American soldiers entails a celebratory practice of violent and sexual domination over resistant brown bodies in the service of imperial annexation.

There is no higher value than freedom in American politics and political thought. It is the foundational value that the country embodies, that citizens desire, and that the state is said to defend. For historian Eric Foner "no idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom."[3] It is considered a universal yearning for all people, so unquestionable is its practice. According to the revolutionary claims in the Declaration of Independence, all people are endowed with liberty. It is an inalienable right that cannot be granted or taken by others, and part of what makes the American people coalesce into a polity is that they together hold the truth of inalienable freedom so obvious as to be self-evident. Throughout US history, what people mean by freedom has differed dramatically—it has included uncoerced action, political equality, emancipation from slavery, participation in governing, nondomination, individual responsibility, the abolition of tyranny, and revolutionary collective action to bring a just and equal society into being. Freedom is a notoriously contested concept, as its meaning continuously shifts in different historical moments. But across different uses, freedom has always signified the highest of human aspirations. Even with the multiplicities of freedom, the insistence

in "The Water Cure in the P.I." that torture is a practice of freedom would seem impossible, nonsensical, or profoundly and unsettlingly wrong.

Many critics condemned the brutality of the water cure during the Filipino-American war, as did critics one hundred years later in another war that promised freedom through occupation—the War on Terror—in which the signature method of torture, waterboarding, echoed the water cure. In both cases, critics argued that torture and freedom were opposites, and therefore that supporters of water torture were morally bankrupt and politically misguided because they presumed that it could serve freedom. This comforting response defended the virtue and purity of freedom while separating it from the ugliness of imperialist, cruel, and racist torture practices. But what if the soldier's song bluntly articulates a paradoxical and unsavory truth? What if torture *is* a practice of American freedom? What if popular forms of freedom have entailed not merely the celebrated practices of individual liberty, rule of law, or shared participation in collective governance, but also torture, dispossession, and racial domination?

Ugly Freedoms interrogates practices of American freedom to examine the oppressions they legitimate as principled ideals. Throughout US history, freedom has taken shape as individual liberty and emancipation from tyranny, but it has also taken shape as the right to exploit and the power to subjugate. The American Revolution is perhaps the archetypal expression of political freedom in the United States, when former colonial subjects liberated themselves from the yoke of unjust monarchy in a radical act of political world-making. The founders brought a new democratic society into being, and galvanized a form of free subjectivity beyond individual rights to include the shared making of politics. Yet this liberation was only possible because of widespread land theft from indigenous peoples who had inhabited the land upon which they declared independence. Violent and world-destroying acts of dispossession were practiced by the founders as freedom: the freedom of settlers to take land in order to instantiate a new government, the freedom to cordon off native territory by labor, treaty manipulation, murder, and fiat in order to exercise independence.[4] This practice of freedom disrupted indigenous political systems and land relationships in order to be free from monarchy, a freedom that continues to this day in ongoing settler practices of land appropriation and cultural erasure.

The American Revolution also relied on and was funded in part by the enslaved labor of millions of Africans and their descendants. Slavery, legalized by US juridical processes, was interpreted by enslavers not as the opposite of liberty but as a practice of liberty. Some colonialists' desire to practice

enslavement unregulated by the British Crown was precisely what led them to support the self-rule of national independence.[5] Political theorist and slaveholder John C. Calhoun, like many others in his milieu, argued that slavery was necessary for freedom.[6] It entailed the freedom of local control and citizens' self-rule. Slavery comprised the freedom to improve the land in an orderly fashion as well as the freedom of private property, as it authorized white property owners to use the labor of their Black human property largely as they decided. Slavery was the basis for free white institutions, and it provided his fellow enslavers the freedom of mastery, prosperity, and leisure, including the leisure to write treatises on liberty.[7] The system of slavery was thus not merely considered the opposite of freedom but also a practice of freedom: the freedom of the master.

At other moments in US history, freedom was a legitimating factor when the United States entered the second world war, helping to mobilize the fight against the genocidal authoritarianism and violent territorial expansion of the Nazis. Yet US efforts to support global freedom also legitimated imperial wars like those in the Philippines and Vietnam, as well as more recent neoimperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The War on Terror was explicitly called a war for "Freedom against Fear" as President George W. Bush articulated, liberating both the United States and other countries from the specter of terrorism. Even its military operations were titled "Operation: Enduring Freedom" and "Operation: Iraqi Freedom" to emphasize the centrality of freedom as a guiding principle. The War on Terror killed hundreds of thousands of people, destroyed the infrastructure of both Afghanistan and Iraq, installed crony capitalists as leaders, and siphoned both countries' natural resources and national industries for the benefit of US-based multinational corporations.[8] Within the United States, the War on Terror justified pervasive domestic surveillance, widespread and ongoing state harassment of people with Arab or Muslim backgrounds, and the mass securitization of public space, each in the name of American freedom.[9] Throughout US history, the pursuit of freedom has legitimated democratic revolution, slave emancipation, labor organizing, and social justice movements for gender, sexual, and racial equality, but it has also legitimated slavery, indigenous dispossession, environmental destruction, sex and gender oppression, and the violent machinations of a "free" market that enable the powerful few to accumulate vast wealth amid widespread poverty and homelessness. Practices of freedom include enslavement and exploitation as much as independence and emancipation.

Freedom is thus, at once, the highest ideal in American politics and also the most brutal. This ambivalent legacy demands a full reckoning. Celebrated

practices of freedom like self-rule, full participation in governance, and nondomination are crucial for understanding the complexity and possibilities of freedom. But systems of domination like imperialism or capitalism have also unfolded in freedom's name. Capitalism's economic exploitation is justified as an engine of freedom for individual and global prosperity, and imperial control of other states is understood by its practitioners to bring freedom to unfree peoples. Freedom is not the overarching driving force that constitutes these different systems of power, but its tenets are capacious enough to justify each one of them. It is too reassuring to claim that these systems are only falsely justified as freedom, that they only fabricate or dissimulate their connection to freedom as a fig leaf to cover true motives. This claim preserves freedom as a righteous, hallowed ideal. But the trouble is not that these practices demonstrate a failure to embody the correct ideal of freedom. Nor is it that the virtue of freedom is tragically subverted by bad actors who erroneously use freedom to legitimate their predation. The trouble is that ideals of freedom can be produced out of and within what Saidiya Hartman calls "scenes of subjection"—that freedom can legitimately be practiced as subjugation.[10] Freedom can entail both nondomination and domination, both worldmaking and world destruction, both challenges to and impositions of unjust authority. Rather than disavowing this dynamic to discard subjugating freedoms as either insincerity or false consciousness, I take the ambivalence and violence of freedom's expression seriously. *Ugly Freedoms* de-idealizes freedom and its entailments.

This book examines four specific iterations of modern freedom, with a focus on how they take shape in the United States from colonization to the present: first, freedom understood as the practice of individual liberty alongside a liberal civilization that codifies it. This iteration of freedom envisions continual human progress toward peace through individual self-possession, noncoerced activity, rule of law, and economic prosperity, but often excludes vast populations as unable to achieve self-possession, while it depicts nonliberal polities as barbaric and nonwhite peoples as requiring discipline or eradication in the service of liberty. Second, it challenges freedom understood as the historic emancipation from slavery, a presumed past political process that ended Black slavery and paved the way for inexorable progress toward racial equality. This version of freedom continues to identify freedom with mastery, thus enabling new forms of racial domination bound to the dynamics of slavery that continue into the present. Third, it challenges freedom interpreted as private property and individual choice in economic markets, an iteration of freedom now closely associated with neoliberal capitalism. This version

of freedom values individual control over the property one owns, and offers individuals unfettered access to a competitive marketplace in which all presumably have equal capacity to trade and profit, even when their lives are otherwise riven by material and social inequality. This freedom entrenches poverty and inequality across the globe, while impelling people to reject supportive relations with others, condemn public life as domination, and structure their lives as a series of capital investments. Last, it challenges freedom understood as rational thought and human exceptionalism, an iteration that grounds freedom in the sovereign will of a logical and reasonable subject who overpowers the limits of nature to dictate her own destiny. This type of freedom often justifies violence over nature, over other animals, and over people deemed irrational. It destroys habitable environments while entrenching hierarchies of living creatures, and it hastens global warming.

I name these freedoms "ugly freedoms." By using the term *ugly* to describe freedom, I draw partly from an aesthetic category of interpretation to name an affective experience of antipathy or dissonance, and a judgment of offensive action. Ugliness as an aesthetic judgment attaches to things with subjectively determined displeasurable properties that work in multiple sensory registers of vision, smell, and taste when experiencing something disturbing, a sensorial multiplicity that is important throughout this book.[11] At one level, I draw on these aesthetic categories in a political way by examining how they connect to political and economic deployments of freedom.[12] Primarily, however, ugliness, as I use it to describe freedom, specifically challenges the claim that what it judges is an ideal and is universally desirable. To call these four varieties of freedom and their offshoots ugly is to emphasize how a celebrated value of nondomination or uncoerced action can be practiced as brutality, which also leaves this brutality discounted or disavowed. For freedom is ugly not only when it legitimates mass harm but also when its practitioners and tenets disregard these harms to uphold freedom as an always celebrated virtue. This disregard is central to freedom's status as a universal ideal. "The Water Cure in the P.I." song is atypical in this sense, in that it makes the link between freedom and torture explicit and celebrates rather than dissimulates their connection. Typically, to call a political action "free" means that this action is principled and noble, in the best interest of all people, and the most desirable choice in a field of options. Ugliness as a political assessment targets how principles and actions of freedom are granted preeminence even when they support widespread subjugation. The ascription "ugly" draws attention to this disregard and disavowal, gnawing

away at the ceaseless affirmation of freedom's virtue, challenging the veneration of actions practiced under its mantle.

The injuries produced by the pursuit of modern freedom are well documented in feminist, Black, indigenous, and anticolonial thought, among others, which detail how philosophies of free practice can rely on a metaphysics of gender, race, and civilizational enlightenment that harm and exclude those considered too dependent or barbaric to practice freedom or be worthy of its responsibilities.[13] Ugly freedoms rely on those formative accounts while arguing that those harms and exclusions are not only the violent effects of freedom *but can also be considered free practice*. The water cure, for one, was a practice of freedom for American soldiers who enacted it. They did not invent this claim on the fly or justify their violence erroneously, but they drew from long-standing ugly freedoms practiced for centuries in the United States to interpret torture against people of color as an exercise of freedom. Freedom as subjugation is also found in the aptly named "Ugly Laws," laws created around the turn of the twentieth century in various American cities to forbid visibly poor or disabled people from inhabiting public space. Ostensibly to celebrate and beautify public life by removing "an unsightly and disgusting object . . . an improper person to be allowed in public," as the language of one municipal code explained, the Ugly Laws generated free movement in public by denying power to, and disavowing from public consciousness, the people whose poverty and physical struggles emerged out of war, industrialization, bodily difference, and immigration.[14] As Susan Schweik has analyzed, Ugly Laws constructed a political sphere organized specifically by excising "unsightly beggars"—people whose workplace and war injuries or malnutrition revealed in physical form the effects of capitalism and imperialism. The Ugly Laws named these conditions unworthy of and disconnected from American political experience, while deeming nonnormative bodies and unfamiliar cultural practices unsuitable for public life.[15] Many Ugly Laws were not overturned until the mid-twentieth century. The Ugly Laws made explicit one logic of ugly freedom: instantiating public freedom by refusing access to and practicing violence upon bodies deemed unworthy, while also denying those bodies political legibility. It also, I would suggest, inadvertently condemned the freedoms it enabled as "ugly."

Ugliness has historically served as a social and political judgment, one that in Euro-American philosophy has often appraised the worth of peoples and cultures in a hierarchical fashion, placing elite European-derived practices and features as the standard for the beautiful and desirable. Aesthetic claims of the

beautiful and the ugly frequently map onto constructed political distinctions: modern and backwards, rich and poor, white and Black, Christian and Jewish and Muslim, pure and dirty. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, aligning with systems of enslavement, industrial capitalism, and colonialism, ugliness became attached to non-Western cultural behaviors and nonwhite physical features, whereby features associated with wealthy white European Christians became the beautiful, and ugliness attached to Blacks, Jews, poverty, disability, and indigenous peoples. Designations of ugliness helped to lubricate the politics of servitude and extermination. As in the Ugly Laws, ugliness derived not merely from subjective judgments of the repulsive or obscene, but importantly from the copresence of things that were expected to be segregated: ideal and degenerate, normative and abnormal, and racial and religious diversity.[16] Ugliness invoked the discomforting presence of the deviant thing next to the object that signified rectitude, symmetry, and beauty when undesirable bodies and practices rubbed up against those deemed desirable and demanded to be reckoned with.[17] Ugliness derives from diverse political orders that produce encounters with difference, diversity, and interconnection as undesirable and suppress the granting of power to those who deviate from the standard or are considered unworthy, inadmissible, or just plain gross. Calling freedom ugly highlights how freedom is imbricated in politico-aesthetic judgments of degeneracy, worth, and power, judgments that cultivate xenophobia, political separations of peoples, and the rejection of collective mutuality.[18]

The anti-mask protests during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate key problems of ugly freedom. Anti-mask protestors rejected the mask wearing and social distancing required to stop the spread of the deadly new virus, and did so as a principled stance of individual freedom against government paternalism. The freedom to flout health recommendations, named "health freedom" by its supporters, relies on principles of individual sovereignty and limited government power over personal decision-making. It also relies more subtly on freedom as the capacity to refuse dependence, and on nonresponsibility for the world outside one's constructed private sphere. The refusal to distance or wear masks disregards the copresence of others, which makes all other people around the anti-mask protestors much more vulnerable to the virus while it actively thwarts public health efforts to prevent mass death. Health is a socially interconnected phenomenon that depends on public measures, environmental regulation, and economic distribution at a widespread level. The anti-maskers fantasize away these interconnections in order to recuse themselves from both individual and collective responsibility for stanching the crisis. Freedom here means to be free from the burden of others'

vulnerability—to be free from recognizing one's complicity in making others vulnerable. It is to be free from the shared burden of public care by imagining health is only a personal concern. Their freedom entails a performance of invulnerability through the presumed capacity to reject interdependence by sheer force of will.

The "health freedom" of the anti-mask protestors led to the rapid spread of COVID-19 across populations and some of the highest COVID death rates in the world. Anti-mask protestors did not call for a freedom that would prevent mass death by demanding free healthcare, or housing for all people, or robust public resources to fund vaccines and solutions, which would rely on a version of freedom grounded in shared interdependence, collective accountability, and a bodily dignity that stands in solidarity with the most vulnerable as an expression of mutuality. It therefore reveals the necropolitical underpinnings of their ugly freedom, as the freedom of mask-free masculinity sacrifices the lives of the elderly and immunocompromised, as well as poor, minority, and immigrant populations more vulnerable to COVID-19 both because they are more likely to be "essential" workers forced to work during the crisis, and because of long-standing racialized health inequities. By making vulnerable people even more vulnerable, the anti-maskers enact the domination they claim to reject. The COVID warriors practice a freedom to expose others to death, and indeed to be free *from* them.

Ugly freedom entails a dynamic in which practices of freedom produce harm, brutality, and subjugation *as freedom*. I use the language of ugliness to push past the positive agencies and idealized practices that are the supposed exclusive provenance of "freedom" to see what forms of damage they legitimate or incorporate. Ugliness names disruptive experience, and I deploy it to disrupt the exclusively positive way freedom is typically understood to highlight the domination practiced in its name.[19] The explosive growth of housing evictions in the United States reveals this ugliness in our present moment. Eviction, as the freedom of landlords to remove nonpaying tenants from their property, draws from freedom as ownership and as the capacity to make a profit in a free market, two of the central tenets of liberal freedom in capitalism. It involves a landowner's freedom to control private property and to acquire economic independence by renting land.[20] In a neoliberal era when wages are depressed, state support for impoverished families is minimal, and rent prices have skyrocketed in a deregulated housing market, the entire housing system prioritizes owners' profit over renters' lives. Landlords also benefit from freedom as the rule of law, as in this case the law is tilted toward ownership rights over the rights of those who rent property. The law

thus deepens asymmetries of power that force people with low incomes to pay extraordinary amounts for housing or become unhoused. The freedom of landlords to evict poor tenants both requires and disregards systems of political economy that make one person's poverty a source of profit for others. Those evicted are primarily poor women and their children—especially Black and brown women—who cannot make enough money in minimum-wage jobs to both support their family and pay high rent, nor do they have enough legal or social backing to stay housed in one of the most economically unequal countries in the industrialized world. Evictions damage the lives of those who are evicted, destroying the stability and connection provided by housing and familiar neighborhoods while thrusting vulnerable people into dangerous situations. Evictions, and their support in legal policies and law enforcement, show how the legacies of dispossession, mastery, and patriarchy are not historical embarrassments but present structures of power that continue to be practiced as freedom.

The freedom to evict is similar to the freedom of gun ownership, enshrined as a core individual freedom in the United States and practiced in a more explicitly violent way.[21] Gun ownership carries the promise of strengthening personal freedom as individual sovereignty. If sovereign power, classically defined, is the final authority to make decisions about life and death within a given sphere, then gun ownership allows owners final say in deciding who shall live and who shall die within their personal radius. It allows owners, especially the white men who make up a vast majority of the gun-owning population, the promise of control over life and death on their own terms. Individual freedom practiced through gun ownership constructs political relationships through analytics of control and threat assessment rather than equality or cooperation. It is not a new phenomenon, as it reflects what Nikhil Singh describes as a historical inheritance "that invested every white person with the sovereign right to kill," a form of individual freedom derived from indigenous dispossession and slave ownership that I examine in chapter 1.[22] Combined with new statutes like Concealed Carry and Stand Your Ground laws that allow people to carry guns in public and claim self-defense in offensive murder, guns now deepen a sense of freedom as individual capacity to control the life and death of others, especially the racialized and immigrant others so often deemed a threat to stability and order in US political discourses.

Evictions, anti-mask protests, and gun carrying entail practices of freedom that only exist through violent power unevenly distributed to the people who already have relatively higher access to it. All of these ugly freedoms have historical antecedents in US politics even when they take new and innovative

form. Within their fashioning of individual freedom, the harm principle—the central tenet of freedom in liberal theory—is reconfigured: individual freedom does not stop if one harms another, countering what John Stuart Mill would claim to be the limit of freedom's expression. Rather, through gun carrying and anti-masking, individual freedom is now expressed by the very capacity to harm another. Evictions operate similarly, in that the freedom of a landlord's property ownership reaches full expression in the life-damaging power of eviction. Chandan Reddy has shown how state bestowals of freedom for some can unleash state violence on others, especially minority populations, a dynamic that is made clear in the ugly freedoms practiced by landlords, gun carriers, and COVID anti-maskers.[23] In addition, in these examples the same people accorded freedom are those also granted the capacity to injure others. Indeed, their freedom is expressed through the individual capacity to enact harm. Reddy persuasively argues that freedom often comes with violence, and *Ugly Freedoms* argues further that freedom often *is* a form of violence.

YET THE UGLINESS OF FREEDOM IS ONLY HALF THE STORY. The obverse of ugly freedom is not beautiful freedom, as if the capacity for shared world-making grounded in free action, collaborative flourishing, and equal power for all is an act of beauty, an ideal vision of purity, or an object for disinterested contemplation as in Kantian aesthetics. Instead, I want to emphasize a second and different type of ugliness. From the perspective of the visions of freedom outlined above, there are political and economic conditions deemed "ugly" and undesirable precisely because they seemingly cannot offer opportunities for freedom: these include deep dependence, obstructed agency, and moral debasement. In response, I examine what is possible *within* these rejected conditions for cultivating less conventional yet generative practices of freedom. If most versions of freedom construct boundaries that exclude reliance on others or dissolute behavior and relegate weakness to the category of unfreedom, I examine what unexpected freedoms can be found in those exclusions. What freedoms are found in the discarded places that the Ugly Laws, for one, rejected as unfree, the spaces cordoned off for "unsightly," "improper," and "disgusting" life? What freedoms are cultivated by and within these putatively ugly conditions, practices that might otherwise seem too disturbing, minor, or compromised to qualify for the grand descriptor of "freedom"?[24] Can these practices, rejected by conventional perspectives on modern freedom, actually offer less brutal and more life-upholding visions of what freedom can entail?

The critique of certain forms of freedom as "ugly" lays the foundation for examining practices of freedom that these very forms would otherwise denigrate as ugly and unfree. I explore the copresence of alternative freedoms, overlooked as unworthy or demeaning by conventional standards of freedom's exercise. Practices shunted to the undesirable part of the spectrum can showcase undervalued and uncelebrated modes of freedom. In the context of my critique of neoliberalism's violent takeover of politics, I see communities also finding petty and peculiar ways to reject neoliberal rationality as a governing ideal. They craft unconventional ways of living habitably with others off the radar—ways often seen as too uninspiring to be interpreted as freedom. I highlight how Black emancipation generates new forms of white supremacy, a key dynamic of ugly freedom in this book, while also exploring the unsettling actions that thwart structures of antiblack domination, even when these activities do not look like resistance or agency. Alongside practices of individual responsibility and human exceptionalism that further climate change, we can also find experimental freedoms in toxic waste zones and dank bodily registers like guts, which emphasize distributed agencies across many species and nonliving matter. Together these more-than-human collective subjects can creatively revitalize their decimated polities—polities that necessarily include the land and all it sustains.

The phrase "ugly freedom" thus has a double meaning in this book. In its first meaning it is an attack on certain freedoms understood as unproblematic political ideals. In its second meaning it is a generative resource for identifying alternative visions of freedom in practices rejected or disparaged by the first version of ugly freedom—freedoms that might otherwise be deemed too inconsequential, repellant, or deflating to qualify as such. Aristotle claimed that beauty is an ideal that marks something as distinctively attractive, and that the disagreeableness if not repulsion of ugliness is its opposing category.[25] But ugliness as I use it disrupts the boundary that demarcates desirable from undesirable things, ideal from nonideal instantiations, pleasurable from unpleasurable sensations, or perfect from debased forms.

There is a minor tradition in political theory of learning from the ugly as both a vital resource for political critique and a site of expansive possibilities for divergent sensorial experiences that can contribute to a more equal polity.[26] Theodor Adorno, for one, emphasizes the diagnostic qualities of ugliness; the world is full of injustice and barbarity, and this demands sustained attention to the things and people deemed degenerate and despised, since those affective judgments often indicate problems of social subjugation. Adorno argues that ugliness "stands witness for what domination represses

and disavows" and thus attends to those discarded by violent social ideals of worth and beauty. Disruption of the "beautiful" is a key aspect of ugliness's power. In a few short pages nestled within *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno suggests that to probe the ugly is not to languish in the cruelty or suffering brought on by the dismissal of things and people judged to be ugly, but to understand and denounce the violence that underpins it.[27] In provoking dissonance with social ideals, ugliness therefore "refuses to affirm the miserable course of the world as the iron law of nature," and in this way holds open a space for rejecting that course and even, perhaps, for imagining emancipation from it. Ugly freedom as a concept draws from this dynamic to delegitimize claims of freedom as always ideal and to tarry with the critical generativity of ugliness.

Leah Hochman's study of Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn argues that his experience as designated ugly and deformed allowed him to generate a politico-aesthetic philosophy in which encounters with ugliness—with the things and peoples labeled repulsive, irrational, and outmoded—can supersede socially produced revulsions and inspire social conviviality through difference.[28] As ugliness "was one of the means of framing judgments about minority participation in modern civil society," Mendelssohn aimed to revalue politico-aesthetic categories that valued uniformity over difference to instead encourage diversity over purity, disorder over order. He aimed to both generate access for "ugly" minority participation in the social, and produce new forms of sociality that did not rely on aesthetic hierarchies of beauty and virtue.[29] For Mendelssohn, open encounters with ugliness spur a revaluation of prejudicial values, promote mutuality across variance without devolving into claims of abstract sameness, and cultivate pleasure through encounters with variety—even when the actions or peoples deemed ugly do not and will not reflect idealized forms of action or beauty.[30]

For both Adorno and Mendelssohn, encounters with ugliness do not confirm but disturb what Jacques Rancière has called the partition of the sensible, which include perceptual-political processes that determine what is deemed sensible and regulate what objects, persons, and ideas are worthy of representation.[31] Encounters with ugliness can instigate new ways of perceiving practices of political violence traditionally conceived as imperceptible or unfit for attention, as Adorno demands. And also, as Mendelssohn calls for, encounters with ugliness can help to imagine, articulate, and *feel* what a polity disentangled from domination and constituted by diverse mutuality might be. Their challenges to "ugliness" do not turn the peoples or situations deemed ugly into ideal, pure, or normatively beautiful subjects, however. They do not aim to shoehorn what is deemed ugly into established standards

of beauty. Instead, they challenge the very ascription of "the beautiful" as a form of political violence.

In this second way of using the term *ugly* to identify unvalued freedom, I am specifically interested in forms of freedom that arise out of ambivalent situations, uncelebrated actions, and moments of "suspended agency," similar to those Sianne Ngai examines in her book *Ugly Feelings*, from which my own title riffs.[32] Ngai uses ugliness to flag undesirable affective states and marginal agencies, which inspires my own political interrogations of modern freedom. Ngai upends aesthetic theory's focus on the beautiful and iconic by emphasizing the petty and the trivial, what she terms the "weaker and nastier" realm of aesthetics, and this is the ugliness I draw from when examining otherwise discarded practices of freedom: the nonprestigious, the uninvigorating, the seemingly weak. These freedoms take shape not as the most powerful or cathartic enactments of liberation, but as more ambivalent, trivial, or uneasy expressions. They dwell in the gulf between powerlessness and heroic expressions of untrammeled agency. And just as importantly, they show how free action need not be a hallowed or monumental practice. Ugly freedom in this second valence does not require a virtuous actor, an upstanding citizen, or an ideal political subject explicitly yearning for liberty. Insistence on moral purity, as James Baldwin argued, can be a violent and dehumanizing expectation that denies the lived experience of moral complexity and grants worthiness only to those who demonstrate virtuous victimization for others' sentimentalized salvation.[33] Instead, I focus on practices of freedom in the muddle of situations deemed unvaluable because they do not conform to aspects of freedom deemed ideal, because the people practicing them do not fit neatly into familiar categories of exemplary political subjectivity, or because they can thrive in mediocrity and disgust.

Both uses of ugly freedom aim to revise the typical terms of freedom. In the first, I use ugliness to disrupt and de-idealize iterations of freedom. In the second, I identify practices of freedom in the discarded spaces and disparaged practices of the freedoms reflexively deemed ideal, in order to highlight the productive work of uninspiring, deviant, and displeasurable acts, those seen as unworthy of reverence. The freedoms in this second category often exemplify freedom as collective work to compose a shared world across difference without exploitation or domination, but they can take marginal if not disconcerting form. If the first use of ugly freedom turns an ideal into a degenerate practice, the second turns degenerate practices not precisely into ideals, but into actions worthy of acknowledgment as freedom. I ask how these seemingly undesirable practices might reflect versions of freedom

like nonhierarchical mutuality, the collective composition of a shared world alongside others, and the eradication of exploitation.

While some ugly freedoms in the second use of the term emanate from pettiness or weakness, others bide their time for the right moment to strike, or operate under the expectation of powerlessness to carve out an obscure space of self-governance, or locate expansive potential in being undervalued, or strategically ignore the very terms on which ideal freedoms are envisioned. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman examines this second meaning of ugly freedom as she studies how poor young Black women in the early twentieth century experimented with freedom in ways deemed unacceptable, disrespectable, and insignificant amid poverty and what she explicitly describes as the "ugliness" enforced by white supremacy.[34] These freedoms, which include "the errant path taken by the leaderless swarm," free love, and "the right to opacity," constitute what Hartman calls a revolution in a minor key. She points to freedoms overlooked because they either do not take place in celebrated spaces of public freedom, because the actions may seem too insignificant, or because the Black women experimenting do not conform to whitened images of universal personhood. They are generated by people driven into dingy urban tenements, which then become the site of freedom's practice: "A small rented room was a laboratory for trying to live free in a world where freedom was thwarted, elusive, deferred, anticipated rather than actualized . . . the hallway, bedroom, stoop, rooftop, airshaft and kitchenette provided the space of experiment."[35] Wayward Black women at the start of the twentieth century harnessed the resources at hand in the spaces they were relegated to, from the kitchenette or airshaft, spaces of hurt and disappointment, to seize and invent freedoms enacted by those dismissed either as unfree or as having nothing to offer free practice. These freedoms are particular to the context of their enactment and to the people practicing them. Hartman is not arguing that discarded spaces and dingy tenements are always the space of freedom; she does not romanticize the poverty produced by white supremacy. Yet on her reading these wayward acts repudiate the ascription of "ugly": the ugliness of freedom in this case refers to something else that is crafted in worlds disparaged as ugly, forms of agency that might seem errant or nonspectacular, but are daring worldmaking practices, in ongoing efforts to fight for a livable world.

Ugly Freedoms thus shifts the study of freedom to both interrogate its subjugating practices and broaden its exercise to ignored or maligned registers of action. I do not adjudicate whether different actions practiced as freedom are or are not "real" freedom, but question what versions of freedom

must be fought against, and what are worth fighting for. *Ugly Freedoms* calls some idealized practices of freedom *revolting* and then examines seemingly displeasurable or denigrated ways of *revolting* against them. I am not arguing that practices of freedom cannot be grand, that desires for freedom should not be expansive or motivated by large-scale visions for how to produce and live in a more just and nurturing world. But I am arguing that the sole focus on freedom as a majestic practice both ignores the appalling violence that traffics under its name and discounts many ways that freedom can be exercised productively in otherwise dispiriting, opaque, or "uncivilized" ways. This project is thus a companion to, not a rejection of, those offering more invigorating visions. Ugly freedom finds inspiration in actions and alliances dismissed as worthless, or as being too ineffectual to build common worlds, or too miniscule compared to vaunted acts of revolutionary transformation. It broadens what can be considered freedom.

The etymology of *ugly* is "to be feared or dreaded."[36] Its origin is in the Norse term *ug*, which also roots current use of the interjection *ugh*. When people and practices deemed ugly claim public space or exercise power never granted to them, this can appear reflexively fearful or dreadful to those unaccustomed to or antagonistic to more equitable social relations. The exercise of power by the putatively undeserving or unworthy can evoke the "ugh," as those actions seem chaotic or repulsive compared to established hierarchies of power and desert.[37] This dread and repulsion is precisely what the Ugly Laws aimed to excise from politics. The "ugh" is a response from a position of power to the second type of ugly freedom, as it denigrates ways of acting freely by people who are not at liberty to do so. The actions I examine in the book as free practice in this second valence of ugly freedom can seem perplexing or repulsive from the perspective of conventional discourses of freedom: a thwarting of neoliberal governance by overbloated municipal bureaucracies; a self-governing Black polity that sets fire to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy through gamesmanship, sex, and theft; an agentic environmental subject made up of multispecies bodies, land, dust, feces, and trillions of microbiota as an acting collective against environmental degradation. Each of these practices of freedom embody aspects of ugliness: (1) they might be deemed "unruly" by traditional gatekeepers to politics; (2) they are "matters out of place"—when being in place requires obedience to standard practice, to established hierarchies of power, or to the sensible; (3) they are, in the case of the third example, human-animal hybrids, one of the central forms of ugliness stemming from medieval and renaissance visions of monstrosity, which

also attaches to the Western degradation of blackness as animality.[38] Many of the commonplace descriptors for ugliness are even the same descriptors for radically democratic rule used by those who condemn it: disorderly, offensive, and obscene. This is not to say that designations of disorder or obscenity are merely false judgments of democracy, and the truth of democratic freedom is a beautiful and well-ordered polity. Alexis de Tocqueville warns of the dangers of that presumption.[39] It is, rather, to press disorder or obscenity in new directions, to see how ugliness generates different understandings of what free action might be.

Negative politico-aesthetic experiences are valuable for freedom in their own right, without having to reclaim them as beautiful or grand for this to be the case. *Ugly Freedoms* does not argue that the practices it investigates only have value once they are recategorized as beautiful. Instead, it finds worth in actions otherwise derided as ugly without recouping them back into standard categories of beauty, especially if those categories are themselves crafted out of brutal forms of power. It marinates in scenes, politics, and practices deemed "ugly" to see what possibilities for mutual transformation they incite, making a bid to transmute the reflexive "ugh" into an experience of conviviality out of enmeshment with difference, deviance, and unruliness without redefining it as necessarily ideal or beautiful. It is a common assumption that beauty gets us through the challenges and struggles of the world, but what if it is ugliness that gets us through? What if encounters with ugliness produce different ways of seeing and feeling possibilities for freedom, even or especially when they don't feel grand or inspirational?

Ugly freedoms often take the low road. By focusing on these freedoms—and their expression in denigrated or discomfiting actions that may lack ideal visions—my goal is not to narrow political horizons to the mundane or truncate political strategies to trivial and seemingly less desirable possibilities. Instead, I seek to expand them, to find allies where one might otherwise expect foes or dead weight, to locate collective support in demoralizing conditions that seem to predict defeat, and to identify generative resources in stigmatized situations, dreary institutions, and seemingly vanquished spaces. Ugly freedoms do not take refuge in a politics of "the small and weak" or languish in powerlessness.[40] It is not about settling for scraps of power or reconciling with defeat. Instead I aim to rehabilitate and revalue practices that are dismissively shunted into those categories, practices erroneously condemned as having nothing to offer freedom's expression. These manifestations are often scorned or disregarded precisely because they operate in maligned

registers deemed inconsequential, gross, or embarrassing within traditional discourses of freedom. I thus examine actions and spaces traditionally considered waste, deviance, or worthy of neglect, in order to study their latent possibilities for living free.

Freedom

Throughout this book I scrutinize freedoms popular in American politics and political theory from the start of colonization to the current moment that are premised on ideal values but entail exploitation or domination. I also find practices of political freedom in activities rejected by those ideal values. They can be found in aesthetic works, bodily performances, theoretical scholarship, political projects, and historic places, some of which may initially seem bereft of freedom's possibility. These include defunct sugar refineries, multimedia artwork, the teachers' lounge, gut microbiota, southern plantations, dirty windowsills, awkward sex, and police melodramas. They showcase practices that could seem too problematic to be considered freedom, or territorially disconnected from American political practice, or too small to demonstrate freedom's exercise. Each highlights how domination has been practiced as freedom and also how freedom takes shape in chaotic, uninspiring, or even offensive actions. These freedoms call attention not to the thrilling moments or shiny objects of freedom but to the scrappy and perplexing.

Many of these manifestations challenge the familiar boundaries of freedom. When freedom is envisioned as autonomous agency or masculinist heroism, then practicing freedom through dependence and muted action might seem laughable or humiliating. Numerous practices of modern freedom are grounded in dynamics of white supremacy and Black enslavement, so enacting freedom beyond the purview of whiteness and mastery takes shape in unexpected and often undervalued ways. If freedom has been associated with a practice of sovereignty that is expressed through private property, territorial control, and human exceptionalism, then different practices of freedom enacted by bodies composed of other bodies, other animals, and the land might seem both disturbing and nonsensical. Instead, these practices draw sustenance from arguments in indigenous political thought by Glen Coulthard, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Kim TallBear, and others, to show how individual sovereignty and private property create disturbing and nonsensical boundaries that ignore relational connections between human and more-than-human worlds.[41] Every acting body includes billions of other entities, land particles, and social relations that together compose worlds

alongside all who inhabit them. The freedoms above encompass a set of definitions that can include acts of shared worlding, undoing exploitation, overcoming oppression, or living together without domination, even as these concepts alone are insufficient for envisioning and practicing freedom at any moment. They varyingly exercise freedom as the fight for and activity of composing and caring for the world alongside others, in equality and mutuality, across and in celebration of difference.

Yet freedom does not demand the same set of practices across time and space and history and peoples. It is not an unchanging or stable state nor the special purview of "ideal theory." The water cure is certainly not a universal expression of freedom but is quite particular to the time and place of its enactment. The wandering freedom or queer loving of Hartman's wayward women is also not a universal practice but is specific to the subjects and context of their enactment; different instances of street wanderings or sexual desires need not reflect freedom's expression. Other acts of ugly freedom—a rather mundane sigh of boredom in a teachers' lounge, for example, which I examine in chapter 3—typically only signify freedom in the moment they are exercised. Not all sighs in a teachers' lounge express freedom, clearly. But in the instance I examine here, when teachers are directed to conform their teaching to neoliberal market metrics for student performance that undermine true learning, one teacher's sigh leads to another's knowing eyeroll, and contagious affects of disaffection turn into collective refusal. If conditions set the terms for freedom's practice, then the specifics of any situation matter. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno emphasize, practices of freedom are oriented by specific forms of oppression and thus are always generated out of the conditions they aim to overcome.[42] They derive from particular moments and iterations that often cannot be replicated in other contexts, even when they are guided by similar principles.[43] Freedom refers to many, many ways of attending to and tending a world, and to varied capacities for worldmaking possible in different moments.[44]

Hannah Arendt famously argued that "the raison d'être of politics is freedom," and many traditions of political thought would agree, though they would differ significantly about what freedom actually is and how and where it is exercised.[45] Conclusively defining freedom is a challenge, as it is one of the most contested concepts in the history of political thought, referring both to principles and to the actions, conditions, and spaces motivated by those principles. While it often denotes political and economic independence, release from bondage, self-determination, and/or the condition of not being subject to arbitrary control, it has never meant one thing. No theorist

in the history of political thought has categorically defined its content or its boundary limit; indeed, some of the biggest arguments over centuries of political thought revolve around the meaning and practice of freedom. In versions of freedom influential just in modern Euro-American political thought alone, freedom has taken shape as unobstructed agency; intrinsic individual rights; revolutionary overthrow of tyranny; economic and political equality; participation in civic life; emancipation from slavery; consent to the laws one is governed by; self-ownership; collective control over the production of society's needs; unfettered access to a free market; self-directed labor; radical communal transformation to a world without gendered, racial, sexual, and class hierarchy; and more. Freedom has never been a universally agreed upon value, nor a universally shared one, even when it is claimed as such.

Even with the multiplicity of definitions, no tradition adequately addresses the specific problem of ugly freedoms examined here. Some categorically exclude violence from freedom and thus ignore a range of problems encountered in its practice, while most presume their favored definitions of freedom are ideal, thus delimiting the diagnosis of freedoms neither virtuous, inspiring, nor exemplary. The most widely influential theory of freedom in Western political thought is liberalism, which, as its appellation suggests, takes liberty as its central concern. Yet aspects of the liberal tradition highlight both the problems and misdiagnoses of ugly freedom. Isaiah Berlin's wide-ranging and formative inquiry into "the essence of the notion of liberty" led liberalism to embrace a distinction between negative and positive liberty that narrows understandings of free practice and disavows the dominations within liberal freedoms.[46] Negative freedom entails an absence of constraint and coercion, a condition whereby an individual is left alone to make autonomous decisions. Positive freedom is the ability to act purposively, guided by a vision for what freedom is and how to practice it, rather than merely the absence of interference. This distinction aims to distill many definitions of freedom but limits the identification and interpretation of them, as it makes unstated and unacknowledged presumptions about who can practice freedom, what traditions of thought are relevant to freedom, and whether certain actions even qualify as free.[47] Prioritizing negative freedom, Berlin's liberalism does not address how a focus on noncoercion alone enables domination to flourish outside overtly coercive forms of power, thus omitting exercises of power like exploitation, structural discrimination, or necropolitics that do not fit neatly under "coercion." It also contributes to a worldview that the realm of negative freedom, especially its key expressions individualism and capitalism, are not coercive or disciplinary, while

insisting that collective political action is mainly coercive and disciplinary. It can disregard how powers not reducible to governing authority or social conformity have limiting power on freedom's exercise, including race, capital, gender, sexuality, and disability.

These concerns can be seen more explicitly in the theorist whom Berlin called the best example of negative liberty, John Stuart Mill, who galvanized modern liberal thought by arguing for universal individual sovereignty limited only by the prevention of harm. Mill stated in his treatise *On Liberty* that "the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." Yet he also wrote in the very next paragraph that "we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society where the race itself may be considered as in its nonage . . . despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians."[48] These two claims of freedom are both central to Mill's civilizing project in which the practice of liberty includes despotic imperialism.[49] To claim that these are opposing visions, that the first argument is a universal declaration of individual freedom and the second argument for colonial despotism is an embarrassing or outdated aberration from it, disavows the many ways they are alloyed together in Mill as freedom's expression. Mill's two principles reveal both the ugliness of this type of liberal freedom and the ease with which that ugliness can be disavowed by its supporters, who in this case claim the harm principle alone is the foundational principle of liberal theory. Achille Mbembe has argued that part of colonization's staying power is that it constantly lies to itself about itself, and liberal political theory perpetuates this dynamic when it excavates and isolates Mill's claims of universal individual sovereignty out of their colonial context.[50] *On Liberty* demonstrates two core claims of ugly freedom: first, that practices of subjection and domination can be compatible with, if not constitutive of, freedom, and second, that these practices can be ignored by their supporters, who decline to own the violence their favored systems uphold.

Other prominent approaches to freedom develop more multifaceted analyses, even as they continue to separate freedom from violence and delimit the analysis of its expressions. Contemporary republican theory recovers the insights and practices of the ancient Roman Republic to shift the definition of freedom from noncoercion to nondomination. It thus postulates a more robust concept of power and emphasizes civic participation and public commitment as essential elements of freedom, against liberalism's focus on private life, markets, and individual interest.[51] It highlights the crucial role of action and engagement in freedom's exercise. Yet its emphasis on the virtuous

quality of civic practices can repeat the binds of individualism by focusing too heavily on personal comportment and moral virtue to the detriment of collective activity. Combined with an emphasis on ancient Roman rather than modern Black slavery as the antithesis to freedom, republicanism can sometimes recapitulate masculinity and whiteness as virtuous forms, even as scholars work to generate republican values that are more inclusive.[52] If we still live with the remainders of freedom derived within Black slave societies, then racialized freedom should be central to any analysis of enslavement as freedom's opposing form.

Hannah Arendt's democratic theory shares with republican theorists an inspiration in ancient political practices, and she articulates a version of freedom as participation in public action that has become deeply influential in contemporary democratic political thought. For Arendt, freedom entails performing something new in the world alongside others, the action of great speech and deeds in the reciprocal creation of public life alongside fellow citizens.[53] Attentive to the violence inherent in sovereign power, she argues that freedom does not entail acts of will or sovereignty, as they demand control and obedience from others and thus negate the plurality of worldly action. Freedom as inventive nonsovereign action in public, and as political worldmaking alongside others, opens vast new possibilities for envisioning freedom's practice separate from domination and outside a dynamic of negative or positive determinations to highlight reciprocal action and political creativity. Yet it also truncates the space of politics to public action and narrows the practice of freedom to courageous and virtuous gestures modeled on a European canon of value, celebrating the individual heroics of Achilles, for instance, but disparaging the collective actions of the civil rights movement.[54] Nor does it include practices of freedom that could be grounded in ordinary daily concerns practiced outside spaces recognized as political, or that take other models for free action besides courageous speech and glorious deeds.

For all their differences, these three theoretical approaches share the assumption that freedom and violence are antagonistic, such that acts of violence are ipso facto the mark of unfreedom. Whether the argument is that freedom is limited by the harm principle, as in liberal theory, that freedom is the condition of nondomination, as in republican theory, or that violence undoes the relations of mutuality necessary for political freedom, as in Arendt, each view contends that freedom ends where violence begins. Yet by insisting that violence, domination, and harm mark the limit point of freedom, these arguments conflate normative investments in nonviolence with political analysis of modern freedom's exercise.[55] They miss a range of

complex practices when freedom's exercise entails both nondomination and dominating violence. The problem is not that normative visions of freedom as nonviolent are wrong, but that when also taken for definitive limits they do not address violent forms of freedom that also operate in modern life. This perpetuates the problem of freedom's disavowed dominations by erasing the brutal practices that challenge the idealism of their preferred freedom.

Other traditions of political thought reckon with the ways that freedom's practice can entail violence, including revolutionary arguments in which violence can be part of freedom's expression when fighting against domination. These include revolutionary democratic, communist, and anticolonial political theories, though they all justify their violence as virtuous and cathartic while inadequately addressing freedom's practice in subjugating modes. The revolutionary freedom articulated in the American Declaration of Independence entails the capacity to "alter or abolish" any governing system that destroys its foundations in consent of the governed, and to mutually pledge alongside others to institute a new government for a free and equal people. Upholding neither the moral freedom of virtuous and dutiful individual behavior nor the economic freedom of financial independence, the Declaration's words articulate political freedom as a collective overthrow of tyranny to make the world anew through shared and equal power for all participants.[56] The freedoms outlined in the Declaration accept antimonarchical violence as the price for independence, yet simultaneously discount the violence that independence perpetrates against native populations while excluding a vast majority of people living in the US from its vision of shared power. The Declaration casts revolutionary violence against the British Empire as worldmaking while negating how this worldmaking devastates the worlds of indigenous and enslaved people and bars all women from its practice. If, as the Declaration implies, freedom's revolutionary violence solely targets unjust tyranny, then the Declaration can dismiss the tyranny its freedom creates and justifies.

Karl Marx's communism embraces aspects of the Declaration's definition of revolution while simultaneously arguing that political emancipation alone cannot abolish all forms of unfreedom, especially capitalism's production of economic exploitation.[57] Marx ruthlessly critiques the ugliness of a political-economic system that claims material inequality and economic exploitation are nonpolitical and thus unadjudicable. Capitalism's freedom in profitmaking and individual self-interest produce world-historic violence upon workers and the poor while all people are alienated from others and from their own work in the process of economic exchange; claims of formal equality and freedom before the law obscure and perpetuate this ruthlessness.

However, Marx too wants to preserve the righteousness of freedom by claiming that these exploitative forms of freedom are merely fake manipulation of the real thing: the freedom to sell one's labor while under the formal equality of the law is, he argues, "a mere semblance, and a deceptive semblance."[58] Yet economic exploitation is fundamentally compatible with liberty understood as freedom to buy and sell in a market regardless of external conditions outside of it. The violence of the labor contract is not a *semblance* of freedom but an *iteration* of freedom that refuses to account for power outside of the moment of exchange. Freedom can be practiced in exploitative ways while still being "freedom."

Engaging the ugliness of freedom in both valences, Frantz Fanon's anticolonial political thought examines how modern freedom has been exercised as subjugation and also finds freedom in places disparaged as inferior and worthless. Fanon diagnoses how modern Euro-American freedom sanctions racism, cruelty, and colonization, how violent acts of domination over colonized subjects are practiced as freedom by the colonizers at liberty to control them. His concern is not that this freedom is a semblance but that it has colonized what freedom is and who can practice it.[59] For Fanon, political categories of freedom and aesthetic categories of beauty work together to justify colonization; he condemns the racist ways in which freedom is exercised by colonial powers while the Western ascriptor "beauty" labels colonized people as uncivil and substandard. He rejects the violence of this type of "beauty" as a desire or aim when he states of his argument for liberation, "I want my voice to be harsh, I don't want it to be beautiful, I don't want it to be pure."[60] Like Marx and the signers of the Declaration, Fanon argues that freedom can take shape as violence when fighting against domination, but he also argues that freedom is expressed in the violence of colonial subjugation; the problem is not that colonizing freedom is a semblance but that different freedoms, originating with the colonized, must rearticulate its practice for anticolonial ends.[61] Yet although Fanon addresses the ugliness of freedom in multiple ways, he envisions anticolonial liberation to entail generally masculinist, heroic, and striking gestures that violently instantiate independence with new forms of sovereign determination. Marx and the writers of the Declaration, as much as they offer different visions of revolutionary freedom, share assumptions that freedom requires bold expressions, rousing actions, and cathartic processes of emancipation.

None of these traditions articulates precisely the freedoms that are noncathartic, minor, or compromised. Their emancipatory practices do not imagine how freedom might be found in gestures that are not boldly revolu-

tionary or powerful, but nonheroic and even imperceptible. These include possibilities of freedom in opaque gestures, or actions that would otherwise seem demoralizing, dirty, or unelevated above the drudgework of daily life.[62] Yet what of freedoms practiced in ways that are not galvanizing, or cleansing, or grand? Or collective refusals that are not motivated by desires for sovereignty but something else entirely? How is liberation enacted in less gratifying, less potent, and more desultory ways, but still a process of freedom?[63]

Every practice of freedom has drawbacks and remainders, as no iteration of freedom is wholly pure, righteous, or free from ambivalence. And even though political theorists study the development and inheritance of different traditions of thought, practices of freedom often do not emanate from a single tradition or with loyalty to a set of cohesive arguments. They can be shaped by intermixed or even oppositional derivations and practiced in ways that contradict ideal forms. Versions of freedom that emerge in the lives of ordinary people, or in collective movements on the ground, are often philosophically disjointed, politically ambivalent, and genealogically blurred. This is not to deride those practices as bad or incorrect; to the contrary: it is to point to the real complexity and disarray of both lived practice and scholarly endeavor.[64] All forms of actually existing freedom are nonideal, either partly produced out of domination and violence, or inseparable from their remainders and losses. Ugly freedoms open to the disappointments and ambivalences of freedom's practice.

The ugly freedoms cataloged in this book may thus seem undesirable or deflating. What if freedom might look like willing participation in one's own domination? Can freedom be exercised through bureaucratic sloth? Or through something as boring as statistical manipulation of data? What if freedom is practiced in stealing? Or an eyeroll? What if the subject exercising freedom is composed of an admixture of toxic chemicals and the fecal matter of strangers? Could freedom actually be tasted—as the water cure song suggests? If Judith Butler crucially argues that "the street and the square are not the only platforms for political resistance," how can ugly freedoms both significantly expand the "platforms" available for political action beyond customary spaces, and push beyond the familiar celebrated agencies congealed into "resistance"?[65] The ugly freedoms I explore in the second use of the term, those that are unfairly maligned as unfree, do not presume that resistance always motivates freedom or that participants only qualify for freedom if they are morally upstanding or noncomplicit in unfreedom. Freedom, in this sense, is not necessarily a righteous act by an exemplary subject. Subjects practicing freedom do not need to be fully extricated from the forms of

domination their actions aim to countermand. They do not have to inhabit a position of purity or honor in order to practice freedom, especially as those categories can delimit who qualifies for them in the first place.[66]

In tarrying with practices deemed unworthy or aberrant, these ugly freedoms emphasize modes of agency that may not offer desired or hoped-for visions of freedom, while still demonstrating free action. These acts can include stealing, "foot-dragging," strategic incompetence, and otherwise unremarkable actions that still retain power to push against oppression, as James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* examines.[67] He calls these actions "nonspectacular forms of struggle," as they happen below the radar of expected political action and in sometimes undetectable registers of political agency. Scott, however, focuses solely on freedom as "resistance" and identifies the state as the primary source of oppression people face. When one imagines the state is always an enemy to freedom, then resistance to unfreedom inevitably takes anti-statist form. But the origins of unfreedom are not limited to the state (which is never a monolithic entity in any case) and include more nebulous formations of power that are not easily identifiable as a single source of constraint, even when they are imbricated with state power, like climate change or patriarchy. In addition, as I argue in chapter 2, state bureaucracies can be harnessed in the service of freedom. Foot-dragging and strategic incompetence can even be practiced by state institutions like schools or states attorneys as a challenge to nonstate forms of oppression. Turgid bureaucracies can be an unlikely weapon in the fight against the neoliberal decimation of public life.[68]

Ugly freedoms may not accomplish alone the transformations necessary for an equal and just society. They may not even provide what is desired or needed in the service of those visions. But their ambivalence and bewilderment can be an asset. They offer less dignified, and thus more livable, experiences of action and collectivity. Waiting around for the ennobling, the beautiful, or the heroic can contribute to melancholia, in which a better future seems unachievable and past failures remain the only vision for engaging the present. Perhaps the late twentieth-century advent of left melancholia follows not only the collapse of communist and anticolonial experiments and the rise of neoliberal capitalism as a global superpower, but also the sense that some visions of revolutionary freedom can be too unapproachable, too pure, too heroic. Perhaps paralysis or self-flagellation grows in response to a perception that heroism seems beyond the reach of ordinary people who are constantly doggie paddling just to keep their heads above water.[69] Yet the loss of a particular vision of freedom is not the same as a loss of possibility as such, and this book asks what is possible under relatively visionless con-

ditions. In pushing freedom in different and sometimes unrecognizable directions, it asks: What transformative freedoms might develop, and develop fruitfully, without a galvanizing vision of alternative futures to guide them?

Although this book examines historical and contemporary practices of ugly freedom, its focus on derided and ambiguous acts is particularly geared toward present dilemmas, especially the conundrum of failure and impasse that make up a version of the current moment, in which promises of the American Dream and progress toward a cooperative world order that seemed achievable throughout the second half of the twentieth century are now widely seen to have slipped out of reach in the twenty-first. Part of the challenge, as differently articulated by Wendy Brown and Lauren Berlant, is that there seem to be few large-scale resources for envisioning desirable futures, as both liberal and left visions for a better world have seemingly dissipated but new large-scale visions have not yet arisen.[70] The promises that have organized liberal democracy in the past, including political progress, upward mobility, and respect for the hardworking congealed into "The American Dream," are not sustainable in our current political economic order, yet nothing else equally promising has taken their place at a societal-wide level. In addition, for Brown, left investments not only in liberal democracy but in a more radically economically and politically equitable future have also been weakened by a combination of neoliberal and authoritarian powers. Neoliberal capitalism's erosion of social support for the vulnerable, the ravages of climate change, and the struggle of Black, immigrant, gay, and feminist movements to secure full equality have dismantled many of the stories of a successful life centered around recognition and fairness. Both Brown and Berlant argue that instead of crafting large-scale new possibilities for a more vibrant and just future, people hold on to tattered promises in ways that become destructive and deflating.[71] The resurgence of white nationalism and violent xenophobia, as well as the presidency of Donald Trump, are just some of the reactionary formations arising out of these lost visions.

Ugly freedoms offer a different way of approaching these lost visions. Some of the subjects examined in this book have abandoned the tattered promises of liberal democratic capitalism altogether, even though their abandonment is unguided by a new, galvanizing social-political vision that explicates an ideal future. Their rejection of the present without an alternative vision for the future is not the demise of political action, however. Instead, it still cultivates viable and potent political acts, just in less expected registers of action. In their lack of grandeur, their drudgery, and their concessions, the practices of ugly freedom I highlight offer different ways of organizing power

and community without requiring a clear vision of where they are headed. While some of the ugly freedoms I examine are guided by an explicit vision, whether that be collective mutuality for shared worldmaking, radical economic equality, the Black freedom dreams Robin Kelley details, or a rehabilitated climate, others are not. Without guiding visions they still craft practices of political freedom—and they show how a lack of vision is not the same as a lack of agency. Their practices take shape not as cruel optimism, nor as reactionary *ressentiment*, nor as mere survival, but as a disorganized combination of blithe rejection, mutual decision-making, filthy enmeshment, unruly collaboration, low-key subversion, unauthorized pleasure, and rootedness to place. They may be inchoate or fuzzy, incorporating a sense of a different and a more that is not fully articulable but still felt and desired—an expansive sense that something else is possible, even if it is yet to be carefully limned.

I am inspired by responses to an aligned debate about political vision in postcolonial scholarship, particularly in Caribbean studies, about how to manage struggles for freedom after emancipation from colonialism, once the end of colonization did not lead to a decolonized people governing their futures together but to a postcolonial order governed by predatory capitalism, racial hierarchy, and neglect. For some scholars, twentieth-century visions of decolonial freedom are no longer viable to shape political futures, yet nothing else has taken their place.[72] In response, Yarimar Bonilla reassesses the very measures used to determine the success and failure of political projects, arguing that nonsovereign and nonemancipated political actions, while seeming to carry the connotation of being nonmodern and unambitious, offer political options for thriving while still entangled in the constraints of political modernity shaped by colonialism.[73] She calls the projects she examines "disappointing," which does not mean that they have failed, only that they should be measured by different metrics of value that reveal hope for an as-yet experienced form of collective action. With an aligned focus but studying a different era, Natasha Lightfoot examines "the unfree nature of freedom" in the nineteenth-century post-emancipation Caribbean, studying how freed people navigated the challenges of an emancipation within diminished visions of possibility. She emphasizes modes of agency that may not offer desired or hoped-for visions of freedom but should still be categorized as free, and states: "the narrative of valiant and unified subaltern struggles against domination of the powerful, while recognizable and seductive, does not account for the range of acts chronicled in this book."[74] As Lightfoot and Bonilla might suggest, the second type of ugly freedoms I examine in the context of US politics are not unqualifiedly valiant and may not even be

easily recognizable as freedom. They may not be satisfying, but they are significantly more prevalent than images of freedom as always ideal, ennobling, or epic. With a shift in perception they also cease to seem insignificant. They generate different responses, in which only recognizing valiant actions becomes a problem, fomenting either indifference to lived dilemmas or heroic fantasies of power that can seem unachievable.

The normative vision of "freedom" has dropped off the radar of some important twenty-first-century leftist projects, just as neoliberal and authoritarian forces try to cement freedom's meaning as individualist, free-market, entrepreneurial for the former, and both nationalist and imperialist for the latter.[75] While freedom can seem the sole purview of free marketeers, colonizers, and white supremacists, or alternately as a residue of past and outdated modes of emancipation that have failed, there are many ways that freedom takes shape before, through, and in opposition to those formations of power.[76] It is also common in parts of current humanistic inquiry to argue that agency is an unsophisticated or old-fashioned political category that ignores other ways of living in the world.[77] Of course, a sole focus on resistant individual agency as the form free subjectivity takes undermines more capacious histories of people's adjudications with domination. But challenging the hegemony of liberal visions of autonomous agency is different than collapsing all forms of agency into liberal individualism and then giving up agency as a value altogether. This is especially problematic at a moment when so many forms of dominating transnational power like global finance or fossil-fuel capital insist that resistance against them is impossible anyway. To demote freedom as a collective aspiration in favor of other values like belonging or capacity is not to be unburdened by freedom's legacy but to relinquish a vital resource to fight for a better world. Left-wing repudiations of freedom and agency surrender power and narrative to right-wing visions. As a rejoinder, I use the concept of ugly freedom to offer more textured examinations of agency and freedom, rather than ceding them either to the dustbin of history or to the limited imaginary of a sovereign subject and autonomous individual.

How we tell stories of freedom matters. If the freedom to participate in and help compose a world alongside others is premised on a subject that is not a masculinized heroic individual who self-wills his action, but a collaborative amalgamation of acts from many nonhuman and human creatures that form an agentic ecosystem, then different stories of freedom will emerge from that vision. If freedom is not a rational, self-interested personal choice made in a free market but the communal deployment of obdurate and turgid labor

oriented by neighborhood care, then this might mobilize a more encompassing push against visions of marketized free action. If freedom is not a national proclamation that declares Black emancipation from slavery but rather Black freedom *from* national proclamations of formal liberty, then different politics emerge from that scenario. If freedom is not about self-making, noninterference, or sovereignty but about participatory composition, agonistic collaboration, and the hard, sometimes joyful, sometimes mundane, and sometimes ambivalent work of mutuality across difference, then an entirely different range of actions and actors come into view.[78] Tarrying with ugly freedom, not only in its first register of disavowed brutality but also in its second register of maligned action, showcases undervalued freedoms and instigates more possibilities for free action than those offered by stories of individual agency and nondomination. None of these practices of freedom claim moral purity, unimpeachable motivations, or ideal actions that gratify all those involved. None might be viable acts outside of the particular conditions they are embedded within, or even first-order desires within those conditions. None might even seem to be related to freedom traditionally conceived. But to tell stories about freedom that include these actions is to tell a different story about freedom's practice altogether, one exercised by many more of the inhabitants of our complex and violent world.

Racism, Settler Colonialism, Neoliberalism, Climate Change

Each chapter of *Ugly Freedoms* engages an iteration of ugly freedom and traces different relations of freedom in composite social, economic, and political conditions.[79] They all examine both forms of ugly freedom: both exercises of subjugation practiced as freedom, and unsettling or degraded actions that demonstrate free practice. In all of the chapters, visions of freedom are derived in part from canonical inheritances and practiced in the middle of disorganized, ambiguous, and often contradictory formations. The chapters also aim to challenge the linear temporalities unjustly imposed on the stories they tell: dispossession, slavery, neoliberalism, and climate change are understood falsely as premodern, past, present, and future events, though in truth they upend any kind of historical trajectory. These forms of ugly freedom swirl together at this very moment as the past, present, and future of freedom.

The analysis in each chapter revolves around contested objects—weird pop science, household dirt, distasteful films, putatively high-brow television shows, and pantry food staples. I also include multimedia artworks displayed to be seen, smelled, and experienced sensorially, all of which aim to

create discomfort in viewers, and none of which are conventionally pleasing or conforming to aesthetic standards of beauty. Each object, as I study it, confronts freedom as a problem. And each also opens possibilities for imagining different worlds of possibility, and for thwarting standardized relations of power out of which new visions of freedom are tested, practiced, or created in action. Many might not seem traditional objects or sites for political theorizing, or even worthy of study, but I find productive engagement with objects deemed unworthy for contemplation, unrecognized as political, or seeming to desecrate freedom's hallowed ground. The works I choose are thus typically interpreted as offering no vision for freedom, or offensive visions of unfreedom, or experiences that seem too crass to even qualify for freedom's practice. Yet it is precisely their compromised and problematic status that keeps them productive and open for both readings of ugly freedom.

Chapter 1, "White and Deadly: Sugar and the Sweet Taste of Freedom," shows the historical imbrication of the three ugly freedoms I examine most in the book, white supremacy, neoliberal capitalism, and climate change, to note their germination in patriarchal systems of settler colonialism. I focus on a common pantry food staple connected to childhood innocence and pleasure—sugar—which might seem irrelevant to freedom's practice. Yet sugar offers a material and gustatory archive of freedom's violent practices, and it reveals how some US practices of race-making and freedom-making developed in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean, especially Barbados. Alongside early American figures of freedom like the self-sufficient yeoman farmer of Jeffersonian ideals, and the burly frontiersman single-handedly subduing the wild, another key figure of US freedom is the Barbados sugar plantation owner, a pioneering figure in the history of slavery and freedom whose entrepreneurial and ruthless power quickly traveled to American colonies. While the influence of the Barbadian sugar master is ignored or disavowed in histories of freedom, this figure shaped liberal futures through both practices of profitmaking and political theories of individual freedom, especially in John Locke's contribution to the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, which was created to bring Barbadian practices to North America. I examine current reverberations of sugar and modern freedom by turning to the contemporary artist Kara Walker's massive sugar sculpture, *A Subtlety, Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, which interrogates the ugly freedoms of sugar plantation slavery through a bittersweet sensorial aesthetics. The Marvelous Sugar Baby is birthed by the history of sugar plantation mastery but also showcases different freedoms that overpower the sugar plantation's reach. Its challenging bodily openness offers freedom untethered to slavery, pleasures

untethered to racial and sexual subjugation, agency untethered to the individual, land untethered to private property, and the sweetness of liberty untethered to the horrific predations of sugar.

The following chapters disarticulate the ugly freedoms examined in chapter 1 to focus on their independent dynamics. Chapter 2, "Tragedies of Emancipation: Freedom, Sex, and Theft after Slavery," examines the ugly freedoms of slavery, racism, and Black oppression as they take shape in American narratives of slave emancipation. This chapter engages a body of scholarship in Black and postcolonial thought that I call "tragedies of emancipation," which includes seminal work by Orlando Patterson, Saidiya Hartman, and David Scott, that interprets emancipations as tragedies and attends to the unfreedoms that remain after and through slave emancipation. They ask not merely what freedom has enabled but what it has wrought, viewing emancipation events less as breaks from the past and more as shifts in the racial logics of antiblack exploitation. This chapter accepts and also presses beyond tragedies of emancipation. Its contested object is the controversial film *Manderlay* (dir. Lars von Trier, 2005), which depicts a slave plantation still operating in the US South seventy years after emancipation. On the one hand, the movie is considered by many critics a ghastly spectacle of racism. On the other hand, it has become a film in the archive of Afropessimism, as it can be read to articulate antiblackness as perpetual enslavement.[80] *Manderlay* is doing something different than either of these claims, as it depicts actions that shift the tragedy of emancipation to imagine the end of white supremacy and antiblack domination. These actions are not typical visions of emancipation, however, and might at first even seem to be their opposite. They are easily overlooked because they are small-scale, morally ambiguous, and sometimes violent performances of racialized freedom that trade on racial stereotypes of theft, sexual excess, and ignorance in order to fight for emancipation distinct from either the control of the nation-state or the abstractions of universal personhood. The freedoms they demonstrate reject possession as the hallowed ground of freedom. And they challenge the belief that Black emancipation demands the moral purity of virtuous Black actors for its practice, and for that reason are easily overlooked or derided as self-defeating and shameful. *Manderlay* suggests that there are more options than fated tragedy, ontological pessimism, or revolutionary romance for challenging white supremacy—though they may bear little resemblance to practices of freedom envisioned in the past.

The third chapter, "Thwarting Neoliberalism: Boredom, Dysfunction, and Other Visionless Challenges," examines neoliberal freedom in contemporary

capitalism, noting how a range of recent political-economic developments pushing the privatization of public life, defunded social services, wealth accumulation by the powerful, and securitization of the poor through heightened police power and mass incarceration, all tender a widespread social vision in which money, rather than people, must be free. Yet for all their profound and brutal effects, neoliberal developments are weaker than they sometimes appear. Many challenges to them go unnoticed because they do not take shape as revolutionary acts of resistance, widespread protest tactics, or multilateral governing possibilities. Instead, they look like bureaucratic ineptitude, outdated technology, boredom, cheating, bleak statistical measurements, neighborhood pranks, and even competing neoliberal policies. The critically celebrated and deeply problematic television drama about urban life in Baltimore, *The Wire*, contains an archive of these challenges to neoliberal freedom. They are not robust or satisfying but rather mundane and disappointing, and thus not typically counted as available forces to confront neoliberal power. This chapter uses *The Wire* to ask: What challenges to neoliberalism are fomented by dreary institutions and defunded neighborhoods, and without compelling alternative visions of freedom?

The final chapter, "Freedom as Climate Destruction: Guts, Dust, and Toxins in an Era of Consumptive Sovereignty," argues that the ideal of freedom as it is often understood in modern Euro-American politics—encompassing control over nature, individual sovereignty, human exceptionalism, uncoerced will, and private ownership—is partly accountable for the geological upheaval and toxic pollution of climate change. This version of freedom envisions nature to be separate from the individual and composed of inert objects available for exploitation, so that control of nature becomes an indication of personal sovereignty, and collective action to care for the earth seems a coercive limit on individual agency. Different stories of freedom and subjectivity that tarry in filth and dirt can help make the vast actions required for long-term planetary survival in the face of rapid climate change come to seem both necessary and desirable. Counterstories of freedom as nonsovereign, multispecies, compositional, agonistic, and symbiotic between and within creatures both challenge many of the constituting categories of modern freedom (including individual, will, property, and reason) and ground alternative practices of freedom that could contribute to, not decimate, the ongoing livability of the planet.

This final chapter offers three alternative visions of free political subjectivity that muddle boundaries between humans and the natural world: they are found in the dank register of human guts, in the dirty register of household

dust and shed skin, and in the geochemical registers of preplanetary gases and synthetic toxins, sites rarely explored for their political visions let alone for nurturing the hallowed practice of freedom. Yet each generates alternate representations of political agency, collective action, and freedom. Drawing inspiration from a combination of indigenous political thought, feminist science studies, and queer theories of the inhuman, these visions suggest that each individual and the land understood to be "private property" are made up of more-than-human ecosystems intertwined with nonliving matter, in which intimate material is constantly transformed into other creatures. They claim that the "self-determining individual" is an assemblage of microbes, stardust, feces from other humans, synthetic toxins, aerosolized pavement, and detritus constituted in inextricable webs of collective dependence. They incorporate actants from the microscopic to the cosmic to suggest that freedoms traverse everyday practices of interdependence across the widest of scales, and undo violent divides between private/public, sovereign/powerless, human/nonhuman, self/other. Freedom thus shifts within interpretations of bodies as reciprocal assemblages that together compose worlds at a visceral level—literally in the guts, in the blood, and at the boundary of skin. Ending with Lebanese artist Dalia Baassiri's *The Dust Series*, a set of multimedia paintings composed of dust and shed skin, I suggest that alternative ways of acting with others, connected by multispecies and multimatter bodies often consigned to the gross, impossible, and unfree, are effusing with possibility for practicing a freedom premised on connectedness, nonhierarchy, and place-based rehabilitation. In *The Dust Series*, disgust and ugliness support the collective and equal flourishing of life and land.

Together, all of the chapters engage with land as a practice, place, and site for freedom. They invest in, and do not take flight from, connection to place. Whether it is monoculture Barbadian sugar plantations in chapter 1, southern US agricultural farmland in chapter 2, defunded city neighborhoods in Baltimore in chapter 3, or desiccated California droughtscapes and dusty Beirut windowsills in chapter 4, each chapter examines forms of freedom that commit to rehabilitating the broken physical world they call home. In this they demonstrate a somewhat different type of freedom than *marronage*, a project of flight from racial oppression, a freedom that entails escape from systems of enslavement.[81] The ugly freedoms I elucidate are in many ways aligned with and supportive of this refusal, but they operate with a different relationship to movement and land. Rather than flight as their signature movement of freedom, the ugly freedoms I embrace in this book remain connected to place as a site of nourishment and community, even when that

place has been a source of domination and dispossession, and they fight for its care. Inspired by indigenous demands to care for land and acknowledge interrelated social connections, they aim to rehabilitate the fecundity of land and neighborhood from the destructive practices of the plantation, dispossession, neoliberalism, and climate change. Their practices of freedom emphasize unruly yet collaborative practices of worldmaking that are less about finding refuge than about cultivating worlds by living and flourishing together.

In an era in which the world is burning and neoliberalism plus climate change are together rapidly destroying the habitats of life across the world—whether for generic glass skyscrapers that decimate poor neighborhoods to build investment properties for the global elite, or chemical factories that poison ecosystems—this commitment to the land is specifically connected to twenty-first-century problematics in which there is no place to escape or find refuge, elite fantasies of secret bunkers or a Mars colony notwithstanding. It entails a full rejection of the thoughtless trashing of the earth and its inhabitants. These practices fight for relationships to others and to the land that sustain the long-term viability of our shared world, even amid spaces discarded as worthless. They enact freedoms that do not rely on others to exclude or oppose, that build from social interdependence rather than its destruction, that cultivate shared and equal worldmaking to rejuvenate our stressed planet, and that could help stop the devastation that occurs under freedom's mantle before the world goes up in flames.

notes

INTRODUCTION. UGLY FREEDOMS

1 Paul Kramer offers historical analysis in *Blood of Government*, 140–43. As he argues, the song shows how in the context of US empire, "torture and liberation would be expressions of each other" (141). See also Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 100–101. Singh argues that the Filipino war was a crucial site for war-making as race-making in the United States. See Singh, *Race and America's Long War*, xii.

2 On ways in which the brutality of the war in the Philippines has been disavowed in multiple valences, see Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse*.

3 Foner, *Story of American Freedom*, xiii.

4 Audra Simpson notes that George Washington was referred to as "Town Destroyer" in Mohawk, since his practices during the revolutionary war were so historically destructive. "Savage States."

5 Rana, *Two Faces of American Freedom*; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 375–87.

6 Calhoun, "Speech," 18.

7 Calhoun, "Slavery a Positive Good."

8 Mimi Nguyen has called this "the gift of freedom," in which US wars that claim to free other countries both enlarge American empire and demand ceaseless indebtedness from those "granted" freedom. *Gift of Freedom*.

9 For greater elaboration on this dynamic see Anker, *Orgies of Feeling.*

10 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.
11 Henderson, *Ugliness*; Eco, *On Ugliness*; Rosenkranz, *Aesthetics of Ugliness*.
12 For excellent analyses of the importance of political aesthetics, see Beltrán, "Mestiza Poetics"; Frank, "Living Image of the People"; Panagia, *Political Life of Sensation*; Shulman, "A Flight from the Real"; Schoolman, *Democratic Enlightenment*.
13 Those most important for this book include work by C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Charles Mills, Orlando Patterson, Wendy Brown, Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, Uday Mehta, David Scott, Jodi Dean, Kim Tall-Bear, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Fred Moten, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Aziz Rana, the Combahee River Collective, Lisa Duggan, Donna Haraway, Walter Johnson, Nikhil Singh, Gary Wilder, Eric Williams, and Linda Zerilli.
14 Schweik, *Ugly Laws*.
15 Eco, *On Ugliness*, 12.
16 Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, 7–9.
17 Henderson, *Ugliness*, 29.
18 On mutuality and separation, see Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.
19 In some 2020 uses, for example, American politicians described the theft of public money by predatory for-profit educational institutions as "Freedom Scholarships" and organized the burning of mail-in voting ballots as a "Dumpster of Liberty Lighting Ceremony"; these uses, while a form of social media branding, also indicate how freedom can entail siphoning money from the poor to the wealthy, as well as the rejection of one's own authorization of leadership. "Education Freedom Scholarships"; "Dumpster of Liberty Lighting Ceremony."
20 Desmond, *Evicted*.
21 I write about this in greater depth in "Mobile Sovereigns."
22 Singh, *Race and America's Long War*, 27. Singh examines how policing at home and imperial wars abroad are connected by shared practices of racism, and I would add that they also reflect shared practices of freedom.
23 Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*. See also Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.
24 Alexander Weheliye insists—without the embrace of freedom but with a deep focus on the spaces that would otherwise seem devoid of it—on "the importance of miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life." *Habeas Viscus*, 12.
25 Aristotle, *Poetics.*
26 As opposed to the major tradition in aesthetics, in which ugliness is rarely examined—including in Kantian, Hegelian, and Platonic aesthetics.
27 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 49.
28 On conviviality as an everyday practice of joyful interaction across difference, see Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*; Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native.*
29 Hochman, *Ugliness of Moses Mendelssohn*, 9.
30 Compelling examinations on the links between difference and democracy include Norton, *On the Muslim Question*; and Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity*.

See Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance* on democracy's bodily comportments. On the opposite dynamic, which involves salacious pleasure in encounters with racial and economic difference by the white and wealthy, see Heap, *Slumming*.

31 Panagia, *Rancière's Sentiments*; Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.

32 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.

33 Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel."

34 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 104.

35 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 59, 61. See also Hancock, *Politics of Disgust*.

36 "Ugly, adj. adv. and n." in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

37 Jason Frank notes how conservative political theorists including Edmund Burke find democracy's undoing of established hierarchies disgusting, that the reconfiguration of authority and power is so unsettling for Burke that it is felt as disgust and bad taste. Frank, "Democracy and Disgust."

38 On blackness and animality see Jackson, *Becoming Human.* On medieval monstrosity see Eco, *On Ugliness.*

39 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

40 On the problems with settling for the small and weak as the only politics on offer, see Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 25.

41 Coulthard, "Place Against Empire"; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*; TallBear, "Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming." See also Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Estes, *Our History Is the Future.*

42 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

43 At one moment and with one set of concerns, freedom might mean collective activity oriented to what Joel Olson has called the abolition of white democracy. At another it might mean participation in acts of land resurgence inspired by indigenous systems where the "actor" is distributed across nations, bodies, species, flora, space, and time—as in the #NoDAPL protests of native people protesting alongside allies, both human and nonhuman, against the theft of sacred land for an oil pipeline. Or it might mean both at once in a moment where climate change most violently upends the lives of impoverished people of color across the globe. Olson, *Abolition of White Democracy*.

44 Foucault insisted that freedom is not a perfect condition to which one aspires, or a property one has or does not have, but is instead a practice and a capacity and a relationship. It is not limited to resistance but also includes experiments with new forms of subjectivity, alliances, and actions. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*. On tending and intending, see Wolin, *The Presence of the Past.*

45 Arendt, "Freedom and Politics: A Lecture," 28.

46 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 204.

47 For Berlin absence of power is the only true condition for freedom. Negative freedom does not require politics for its realization, as participation in larger projects or collective activity for a better world only lead to despotism. Any shared endeavor will enforce conformity and grant others authority over oneself. Yet freedom in liberalism has never entailed merely the negative right to be free of power, but it also makes freedom the medium and instrument to

take charge of political power. The production of negative freedom and its space of privacy relies on organizing governments, laws, peoples, and power in disciplinary ways to actively carve and maintain the space of freedom from power.

48 Mill, *On Liberty*, 13. For an argument to recoup Mill's liberalism for a more anticolonial politics, see Marwah, *Liberalism, Diversity and Domination.*

49 Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; Pitts, *Turn to Empire*.

50 Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night,* 72. On the idea of a "right to maim" as indicative of the liberal state (which is also a form of ugly freedom) see Puar, *Right to Maim.*

51 Some of the most formative works include Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; and Pettit, *Republicanism*. For a more progressive deployment of republicanism see Gourevich, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*.

52 On nondomination and democracy see Markell, "Insufficiency of Non-Domination." On Black republicanism, see Rogers, "Difference, Domination, and Republicanism." See also Costa, "Is Neo-Republicanism Bad for Women?"

53 Arendt, "What is Freedom?" and *Human Condition.*

54 Arendt envisions the subject of freedom, using the words describing Achilles in the *Iliad*, as "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words." *Human Condition*, 11. See also Arendt, *On Violence* and "Reflections on Little Rock."

55 The late Dustin Howes argued that much of the Western canon of freedom sees violence as necessary to instantiate or protect freedom, and he normatively argues for freedom as nonviolent action to bring a just world into being, including actions like general strikes, sabotage, and noncooperation. I wish we could have had more time to talk over these ideas before his untimely death. *Freedom without Violence*.

56 There are two freedoms articulated in the document, one centered on abolishing tyranny, and the other on the act of shared worldmaking through governance. Dustin Howes argues that this contributes to a phenomenon starting in the eighteenth century in which war is only justified when it is in defense of liberty. *Freedom without Violence*, 65.

57 In Marx's vision of freedom, equal participation in the political does not address the conditions of material inequality sanctioned by social and economic powers of capital already in place before political participation begins, so human emancipation therefore requires the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. "On the Jewish Question."

58 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 464.

59 Colonized societies must thus be liberated from what Fanon calls "the Mediterranean values, the triumph of the individual, of enlightenment, and Beauty," and decolonial liberation will turn these violent ideals "into pale, lifeless trinkets . . . a jumble of dead words." *Wretched of the Earth*, 11.

60 Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution,* 49.

61 On freedom originating with those who are first denied it, see Patterson, *Freedom*.

62 This is particularly notable, as within modern political thought access to the supposed elevated realm of freedom is often barred for the poor, women, and people of color, those doing the drudgework who have been categorized as a problem for freedom throughout the history of Western thought. See Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*; Pateman and Mills, *Contract and Domination*; Patterson, *Freedom*.

63 Gary Wilder analyzes nonsovereign anticolonial freedom practices in *Freedom Time*.

64 Political theory's investment in tracing the correct philosophical lineage of any iteration of freedom, as well as the presumption that scholarly critique has to come from a particular lineage or camp—the discipline's efforts to separate and cordon off different versions of freedom in order to isolate and identify ideals in their pure or canonical form as they emerge in different historical moments and individual arguments—can often be intellectually productive. But when applied to lived experience it can also work to prevent political analysis of complex practices of freedom as they are exercised and articulated. To make claims for freedom as if they must derive from one tradition or another misses how freedom is reconfigured and practiced today in most political, cultural, and economic spaces and diminishes the ways that political commitments can draw from a range of seemingly disparate ideas.

65 Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 136.

66 On purity, see Shotwell, *Against Purity.*

67 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

68 On the value of public things, see Honig, *Public Things*.

69 On the doggie paddle as a form of everyday survival, see Berlant, "Slow Death," in *Cruel Optimism*, 117.

70 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; Berlant, *Female Complaint*; Brown, *Politics Out of History*; Brown, *Walled States*.

71 Brown diagnoses reactionary formations developing in the wake of these lost visions, including *ressentiment*, moralizing righteousness, border walls, and attachments to violent state power, even within putatively emancipatory projects. Berlant diagnoses an impasse, more felt than articulated, within ordinary lived experience about how to survive if not flourish at the moment of deepening precarity, once the good life inspired by liberal capitalism is no longer operable as a desire (even if it was never viable as a lived possibility.) For both, the lack of compelling guiding visions for how to create and live in a significantly more free and equal world damages political and social futures. I would suggest that this impasse is itself partly a product of neoliberalism. Neoliberal rationality offers no vision beyond ceaseless risk-taking for economic growth; as capitalism in its liberal-democratic-American-Dream variant lays dying there *is* no vision in mainstream political imaginaries to organize social dreams because neoliberalism simply doesn't offer one. See Brown, *States of Injury*; Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy"; Brown, *Walled States*; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

72 I think here in particular of the important work by David Scott, which I examine in chapter 2.

73 Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures*.

74 Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom*, 5. On new modes of freedom that may seem insignificant, see also Kazanjian, *Brink of Freedom.*

75 Kennan Ferguson, "Beholden: From Freedom to Debt"; Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror*; David Scott, *Omens of Adversity*. Evan Kindley asks, "Was 'freedom' always empty after all, an ideological fantasy we are ultimately better off without?" "The End of Freedom," 57.

76 See Gourevich and Robin, "Freedom Now"; Robin, *Reactionary Mind*.

77 As Walter Johnson has importantly argued, scholarship that focuses solely on agency in the study of enslavement, and equates agency with an expression of autonomous individuality, is not only historically inaccurate but also ignores the multifarious ways people lived, survived, and loved during enslavement. Yet Johnson's provocations have led some scholars to err in the opposite direction, to refuse to value agency at all, as they collapse all forms of agency into liberal individualism and ignore the possibility that most forms of agency are not invested in this model of subjectivity. W. Johnson, "Agency," 26. See also chapter 2.

78 On the pleasures of diversity for democracy, see Norton, *On the Muslim Question*. On the ambivalence of authoritarian resistance, see Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions*.

79 See Arendt, "Freedom and Politics": "We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in intercourse with ourselves" (29). See also Zerilli for an elaboration of freedom as action in *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*.

80 Wilderson and Dean, "Frank B. Wilderson III in conversation with Aria Dean."

81 Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*.

CHAPTER ONE. WHITE AND DEADLY

1 Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 175, and "Colonial Pasts and Conditional Futures."

2 For Lisa Lowe, archives of slave ledgers tell an important story of numbers, agricultural practices, or trading routes, but like any singular source cannot tell the full story. Historical political theory tells important stories of freedom, but as many of us acknowledge it is often a story of freedom told by the colonizers, settlers, and enslavers, even as these theorists often grapple with the terrible histories in which they are entwined. Yet there is an archive problem of trying to tell the history of freedom from the perspective of the enslaved and indentured. As Saidiya Hartman and many others have argued, the absence of enslaved people from the archives means that the story of freedom must be told in spaces of absence. While my project is not engaging that precise problematic, I am similarly interested in how maligned or seemingly irrelevant "texts" tell different stories of freedom, or present alternative perspectives on ingrained stories. Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; Hartman,