Third World STUDIES

THEORIZING LIBERATION

GARY Y. OKIHIRO

Revised and Expanded

Third World STUDIES

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Second Edition, Revised and Expanded



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At Yale University, Me'Lena Laudig, after attending a 2016 reunion of Black Panthers in Oakland, California, reported that many of the former Panthers had become Christian ministers. Her observation reminded me of my desire to become a theologian of liberation during my undergraduate years and my subsequent turn to Third World liberation during my graduate studies. Me'Lena's comment led to my elaboration on religion in chapter 9.

Also at Yale, Ethan Estrada joined me in reading and assessing the newer literature on settler colonialism, and Jenny Ye Eun Lee reminded me of my lecture on world-systems theory genealogies.

In fact, Yale is the site of this book's completion and revision. *Third World Studies* is truly a collective labor of love. American studies and later the Program in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration faculty, together with key administrators and a black student protest against racism, allowed me to teach at Yale, an incredible opportunity that revived my flagging zeal for teaching. I can still feel the glow from the heat of my classroom encounters with Yale's incomparable students. The buzz generated by those conversations energized my resolve,

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stimulated my thinking, broadened my reading, and sharpened and enlivened my lectures that became this book. On a personal note, I could not have dreamed of a better ending to my life of learning. Amazing grace.

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INTRODUCTION

Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation reflects on an academic formation that never existed because it was extinguished at birth. Its brief life was no accident. Third World studies began in 1968 at San Francisco State College as a revolutionary, intellectual insurgency led by students of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). Our goal is Third World power, they declared. Our movement is an affirmation of our humanity, our strength, our beauty, and our dignity, they explained. Toward those ends, the TWLF proposed a "Third World curriculum." Instead, college administrators and faculty granted the TWLF "ethnic studies," which is a deception but is the term commonly deployed today. This book revisits the scene of that crime, tracks where the prints of Third World and ethnic studies converge and depart, and posits theories and methods that might constitute and inform Third World studies, which has yet to be born. This, then, is a work of imagination and anticipation.

To clear the deck, Third World studies is not identity politics, multiculturalism, or intellectual affirmative action. Third World studies is not a gift of white liberals to benighted colored folk to right past wrongs; Third World studies is not a minor note in the grand symphony of US history and society. Within the United States, diversity and pluralist versions of the nation trivialize the intellectual and political claims of Third World studies, reducing power relations and their interventions to celebrating cultures, differences, and intercultural competencies. Moreover, Third World studies is not about teaching students "to resent or hate other races or classes of people," as Arizona's SB 2281 (2010) alleges in legislation that rendered ethnic and Chicana/o studies illegal in the public schools.¹ Accompanying that curbing of intellectual freedom was the banning of books offensive to the ruling class from school libraries.² During the 2020s, other states, notably Florida, followed that policing of

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public school curricula and library collections involving matters of race, gender, and sexuality.³

Rather than a retreat into provincialism Third World studies is about society and the human condition broadly. The social formation or the forms and movements of society, its structures, relations, and changes over time are the deep and capacious subject matter of Third World studies. Power or agency and its manifestations exhibited in the formations and consequences of race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and nation as discrepant and intersecting discourses and practices conceive and cultivate the social formation. Attending to the singular, multiple, interlocking, and mobile forces at work in the locations and exercises of power, the social formation demands a complexity in our thinking and action to engage and resist the discourses and material relations that oppress and exploit us.

Since its institutionalization in US higher education, (post-1968) ethnic studies as an academic subject matter remains largely undefined. There are no widely agreed on methodologies and theories particular to and definitive of the field. That absence is astonishing and revealing, considering the hundreds of ethnic studies programs in the United States, thousands of classes taught each year, and tens of thousands of students who enroll in those classes. By contrast, the allied academic fields of gender and sexuality studies have a host of books on theories and methods that define and animate them.

(Post-1968) ethnic studies has resisted a unified approach mainly because, in the name of self-determination, the field began as discrete, separate, and, some claimed, exceptional formations of African American studies, American Indian studies, Asian American studies, and Chicana/o or Latina/o studies. Self-determination, the key demand of the TWLF, came to mean for (post-1968) ethnic studies each group speaking for and about itself mainly within the US settler nation-state. Rare, as a consequence, are institutional arrangements of comparative ethnic studies; most segregate the faculty, curricula, and students of each racialized group. That pattern mirrors and succumbs to the organization of knowledge by distinctive disciplines and fields with their own tribal members, hierarchies, gatekeepers, histories, literatures, cultures, and professional journals and organizations.

In that sense abandoning Third World studies for (post-1968) ethnic studies can be correctly called identity politics and intellectual segregation. I count myself among that generation of scholars. I once wrote that Asian American studies was by, about, and for Asian Americans; as far as I was concerned, those outside that racialized community mattered little to the field I helped create. I have long since abandoned that position, which is commonly called cultural



nationalism. Despite its contrary claims, cultural nationalism subscribes to European national and racialized categories, often to the marginalization of gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and class, and its principal pivots are the relations between (a binary construction) whites, the dominant group, and nonwhites, the subordinate group. Black (or Brown, Red, and Yellow) Power is a potent antidote to the poison of white supremacy, but it follows and is in reaction to white power and is accordingly limited by its model and prior condition.

I appreciate the centrality of African Americans to US history and culture, but I also understand as partial the black/white racialized binary. While I agree with the distinction of indigeneity for Native Americans, including American Indians and Pacific Islanders, I deny the claims of priority, sovereignty, and possession and rights even as I reject the legitimacy of imperial expansion and settler rule. I know conquest, the imposition of national borders, and migrant labor particularizes the Latinx experience, and only Asians were classified as "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from 1790 to 1952. Yet I hold there is more that connects than divides our condition and struggles for liberation as I intend to show in this conversation about Third World studies.

A brief explanation of how this text came into being is helpful here. I had the rare opportunity to teach comparative ethnic studies at Columbia University. Although the university is located in Harlem and New York City, Columbia's entry into (post-1968) ethnic studies was inexcusably late: in 1993, when Manning Marable began the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, and in 1999, when I became the founding director of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race. However, freed from the turf wars that were common on many campuses with long-standing (post-1968) ethnic studies programs, I was at liberty to install a curriculum attentive to the particularities of people of color—African, Asian, Latinx, and Native American—and one that compared those racial formations across their divides while integrating them with related theories of gender, sexuality, class, and nation.⁸ But without faculty trained in comparative ethnic studies, I had the responsibility of devising and teaching that introductory course called comparative ethnic studies.

At first I took a "great books" approach to the class, assigning authors I had read during the beginnings of (post-1968) ethnic studies, including Frantz Fanon, Karl Marx, Mao Tse-tung, and Paulo Freire. The approach failed to cohere because the readings had no overall theoretical organization. Thus began my search for theory. After all, I knew, all disciplines had theories, methods,



and subject matters particular to them, defining them as autonomous fields of study. This book is the outcome of that extended, exhilarating pursuit in dialogue with my patient, discerning students.

Those numerous mobile transactions in the classroom involve translations of lectures, readings, discussions, and understandings. In addition, this text is the written form of my oral lectures; those lectures, always delivered without notes, are voiced versions of my notes, handwritten from my readings. Readings, notes, lectures, books—oral and written traditions—these I consider the sum total of my fifty-plus-year labor in and commitment to the formation and striving I herein call Third World studies.

I would be remiss to neglect the vexed times in which this book was written and revised, prominently, the resurgence of white and Christian nationalisms since 2016. The Immigration Act of 1965 opened wide the gates of the US settler nation-state to increasing numbers of Latinxs, Asians, and Africans, leading to fears of a predicted white numerical minority further endangered by state entitlements conferred on those undeserving migrants from the Third World, or "shithole countries." 10 White nationalism feeds on those anxieties and hatreds even as it flexes powers of white supremacy and compulsory, robust regimes of patriarchy, heterosexuality, normality, class rule, and citizenship. Conjured horrors of caravans at the US border with Mexico require walls and enhanced border patrols, expedited expulsions, bleak cages and prisons, forced separation of children from parents, and "excessive, invasive, and often unnecessary gynecological procedures" on dozens of confined women—tough punishments and lessons for the manifestly unfit and undeserving. 11 Allied to white nationalism is Christian (Protestant) nationalism, which, from the settler nation-state's beginnings conjoined whiteness with Christianity as opposed to nonwhiteness, barbarism, and paganism.¹² The US war without end against "terrorism" and Islam at least since 2001 reaffirms that foundational pact. The reconquest of the settler nation-state and a return to its origins are the unambiguous intentions of the citizen race and Christians.¹³

The first US Constitution (1787), US Census (1790), and Naturalization Act (1790) delineated citizenship and with it membership and rights. As the Supreme Court ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), those originating instruments specified two classes in the settler nation-state: the "citizen race," or "free white persons," and "persons of color," or "another and different class of persons." American Indians were "under subjection to the white race," and African Americans were "not included and were not intended to be included,



under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution" but were property and as such could claim no rights of personhood or citizenship. Freedom, whiteness, and citizenship formed equivalences in the founding apparatuses that constituted these United States.¹⁴

The Book

I was born and grew up on a sugar plantation in Hawai'i. My parents, like their parents, were sugar plantation workers. The plantation, with its social hierarchies of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and nation, was the start of my education. My world beyond the cane fields was, in Mark Twain's memorable, martial words, the "loveliest fleet of islands." In plain view from my home was Pu'uloa, called Pearl Harbor by US militarists for their navy; the anchorage facilitated US imperial ambitions in the Pacific and Asia. Gone was the independent kingdom of Hawai'i, reduced to a US colony; greatly diminished by alien diseases were its native peoples; and significant numbers of Asian migrant laborers tended the vast tropical estates of sugar and pineapple. I came of age in that social formation.

After graduating from a Christian mission high school, unlike most of my peers, I was fortunate to continue my education. California was not yet a Third World state, and the US war in Southeast Asia was raging. As an undergraduate I began as a premed and then majored in religion (theology) and finally history; as a graduate student at UCLA I studied African history. Before my military draft board I claimed conscientious objector status in opposition to all wars but joined another arm of US imperialism, the Peace Corps, which in 1968 sent me for training among African Americans in Frogmore, South Carolina, and stationed me in Botswana. A former British colony, the independent blackruled nation of Botswana was at the time hemmed in by white supremacist states to its south, north, east, and west. Apartheid South Africa dominated the region. In Botswana the Native Recruiting Corporation assembled Batswana migrant workers for South Africa's gold and diamond mines, and a missionary hospital dispensed medicines with "NTO" (native treatment only) stamped on pills for its black patients. Living and working for three years in neocolonial Botswana was transformative, and I returned to UCLA and then back to Botswana for a year of research to complete my studies in African history.

Meanwhile, students had gained (post-1968) ethnic studies, and I was among the first cohort of graduate students at UCLA in Asian American studies. My doctoral degree, though, was in African history, which was the dominion of whites mainly and a few blacks. I might have been the first Asian



recipient of that degree in the United States and failed to land a job in African history. Instead, in affirmation of identity politics, I secured a position in Asian American studies and have been so appointed throughout my academic career. The social formations I count as central to my consciousness and education remain colonial Hawaiʻi and neocolonial Botswana. Spatially Hawaiʻi and Botswana are earth's antipodes, but intellectually they connect and cohere within my subject-self.¹⁵

Authors write from their subject positions, their standpoints. In that sense their writings are autobiographical and shadowed by their places and times. There are those who reject that proposition; they believe scholars can conceive of truths and artists create works that transcend their space and time. They refuse to see the author and social contexts embedded within the texts. Instead, I call attention to my presence in this work, especially because the Third World curriculum proposed in 1968 was neither fully explained nor implemented. My version of Third World studies is accordingly idiosyncratic, though not completely. There are guideposts. ¹⁶

Clearly the TWLF's course of study was directed at liberation, conceived as self-determination. The Third World curriculum was designed to create "a new humanity, a new humanism, a New World Consciousness," in the TWLF's words, lifted from the Third World writer and revolutionary Frantz Fanon. Certainly the subjects were peoples of the Third World—Africa, Asia (and Oceania), and Latin America (and the Caribbean)—but also of the First and Second Worlds, the so-called West (capitalist world) and East (socialist world). In those worlds were the oppressed, the masses, the earth's "wretched," so described by Fanon, and they are the subjects of chapter 1.

Notable were the students' subjectivities as members of the *Third World* and not *national* liberation fronts, as was the case in Algeria and Vietnam, whose revolutions inspired the students' movement for educational transformation. The Third World referred not to nation-states but to regions, areas of the world once conquered, colonized, and impoverished by Europeans. The Third World, according to Fanon, was also a project to solve Europe's problems of colonialism and racism. In 1900 the African American scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois delineated that global color line as the problem of the twentieth century, which was colonialism (material relations) and racism (discourse), the ideology that upheld white supremacy and nonwhite subservience. Third World studies descends from that history of anticolonial, antiracist struggles identified and described by Du Bois, among many others. That global contest was waged over power, of course, the power to know and



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the power to rule. The oppressed and exploited and their relations to and contestations of power, then, are the subjects of Third World studies.

Racist discourse endorsed and advanced European imperialism that ruled the world for over four hundred years, beginning in about the sixteenth century. Around the time of Du Bois's color line declaration, racists warned against a peril produced by colonialism—the uplift and stirring of nonwhite peoples and their migration to the imperial centers of Europe and the United States. Fields of study to contain and mitigate the problem were race relations and ethnic studies. In the United States, sociologists at the University of Chicago were the foremost proponents of both race relations and ethnic studies. Race relations sought to understand and control the challenges posed by nonwhites to white rule, while ethnic studies conceived of ethnicities or cultures as a way to preserve white supremacy by assimilating problem minorities into the dominant group. This original brand of ethnic studies I refer to as (Chicago) ethnic studies.

The sociologist Robert E. Park, a leading figure in race relations and (Chicago) ethnic studies, learned race relations while serving as Booker T. Washington's research assistant at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington was the primary architect of the Atlanta Compromise (1895), which promised African American docility and submission in exchange for white funding for black miseducation. He was also a dutiful student of Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a son of missionaries to Hawai'i and the founder of the Hampton Institute, which educated African Americans and American Indians to work with their hands and not their minds. Race relations and (Chicago) ethnic studies, as instruments of colonialism, thus are antithetical to the emancipatory aims of Third World studies.

But at its inception Third World studies gained institutionalization as (post-1968) ethnic studies and, like the independence movements in the Third World, the field turned to (cultural) nationalism and the nation-state. Chapter 2 considers that retreat and surrender, which betrayed the broadminded understandings of the Pan-African Conference of 1900 and the African and Asian meeting at Bandung in 1955. The latter, convened in the midst of the Cold War, expressed a remarkable vision of a world free from racism and colonial rule and, with that, the attainment of lasting world peace. Contrarily, Third World independence installed the sovereign nation-state, patterned on the European model with elites ruling over the oppressed, exploited masses. Similarly in the United States, cultural nationalism was upheld as the highest expression of self-determination and as an end in itself,

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not as a strategic, albeit necessary, step toward liberation. At the same time, many leading cultural nationalists were also internationalists; they knew that social relations at home consorted with imperialism abroad.

The sovereign nation-state is both spatial and social, consisting of land held as property marked by borders within which rulers ruled over subjects. In the narrative of nation the people were related biologically and were thus referred to as races. They shared a common descent and were of one blood. In addition, under patriarchy men occupied the public sphere or the state because of their alleged virtues (abilities), while women were confined to the domestic sphere because of their presumed deficiencies (inabilities). The heterosexual family constituted and reproduced the nation, and sexuality and marriage were thus state prerogatives. Under capitalism, the bedrock of possession or property, including land, goods, and dependents (women, children, the enslaved), was inviolate. The nation-state accordingly was designed to install and interpellate (produce) hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and (national) citizenship. Those concentrations and relations of power privilege the few and oppress and exploit the many.

As the old imperial order crumbled and colonies gained independence, a new empire, a world-system of nation-states, emerged.¹⁷ World War I and World War II, internecine conflicts waged by Europeans over national sovereignty and imperial holdings, proved to be the old empire's undoing. Under the new dispensation, global peace was pursued through instruments like the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, both composed of nation-states bound by juridical agreements. Upholding the sovereignty of member nation-states, the League of Nations and the United Nations opposed antiracism and decolonization, and only in 1960, after most colonies had gained their independence, did the UN declare that colonization violates fundamental human rights. Capitalism financed and profited from that hegemony of nation-states, and, led by the United States, the world economy was restructured through institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and international trade agreements and organizations, producing economic, political, and cultural dependency as well as, across the color line, generating immense wealth for the few and abject poverty for the many.

The TWLF's choice of a spatial and ideological affiliation with the Third World and its peoples, not the nation-state, suggests a curriculum built around the discourses and manifestations of imperialism and colonialism globally, the subjects of chapters 3 and 4. Imperialism, or extraterritorial powers, was impelled by nationalism and capitalism to produce value and underwritten



by discourses to impose order and subjection. From ancient Greece emerged ideas of geographic and biological determinism; the former conceived of lifeforms, including humans, as shaped by geography and climate; the latter, as decreed by biology or blood. The (European) Enlightenment demarcated the earth by continents—Europe, Asia, Africa, and America—and those divides delineated the four major races with their particular natures. Whether determined by geography or inheritance and blood, the superior race possessed virtues, abilities, and hence rights (divine and natural) over the inferior, incapable races. That project of segregating, naming, and attributing, the discourse of taxonomy, was an imperial exertion of power over the planet and all its inhabitants.

That discourse (language and ideology) of rule materialized the worldsystem, which tracks the career of capitalism. Mercantile or trade-based capitalism produced profits, and beginning in the eleventh century with the Italian city-states, commerce with Africa and Asia was the means for acquiring wealth and influence for Europe in the Mediterranean world. Africa supplied much of the gold that purchased Asian products. By the fifteenth century the Atlantic world eclipsed the Mediterranean, which provided the pattern for the Atlantic world's design of conquest, colonization, and extractions. Enslaved Africans supplied the labor for sugar plantations on islands off the West African coast and later in the Caribbean and America. The enslaved and sugar sold in Europe procured capital to finance the long and perilous journeys around Africa to the Indian Ocean and Asia. Across the Atlantic, American Indians, after their conquest, mined the gold and silver that enriched Spain, and the bullion was traded in the Pacific world for Asian goods. Military bases and extractive and settler colonies secured the imperial, oceanic highways, and capital, labor (migrant labor), and culture moved across the world-system.

In that designed and imposed global web the core accumulated wealth at the expense of its peripheries, resulting in Europe's development and the Third World's underdevelopment. Those connections were related and structured; they were not commerce in the usual sense of exchange, but exploitation. A Spanish colonizer called that highly profitable traffic "an inheritance," gesturing to the entitlements of blood and race. Colonies existed to generate wealth for their owners. Conquest was both material and discursive, and it involved military might but also sexual violence. Rape of the land and people, mainly women, was a method of subjugation and the means for producing and reproducing dependencies. Language was a crucial weapon in the colonizer's arsenal. Native languages and therewith ideologies were removed, replaced

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with the conqueror's tongue, producing colonized minds and objects (not subjects). Without a consciousness of the subject, self-determination was more easily denied.

Like language, education, considered in chapter 5, is an apparatus of the state and capital to exploit, colonize, and mold useful, docile citizens and workers, but it can also mobilize resistance to oppression and exploitation. It was therefore a battleground for what some called the culture or canon wars of the 1980s and 1990s and renewed in the 2020s sparked in part by the TWLF'S 1968 strike. But long before that historic student uprising, US education was established to manufacture preachers and teachers to school the untutored masses, rendering them safe for democracy and useful for capitalism. White men from the elite assumed that (white man's) burden, while white women were at first excluded and later nurtured in schools for mothers of the republic to reproduce the next generation of pliant citizens and workers. Missionaries similarly tended to the maternal instruction of childlike American Indians, and their Foreign Mission School, established in 1816, civilized into subservience native peoples, including American Indians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians.

Samuel Armstrong found his calling in that ministry to the republic's "darkies"—Hawaiians, African Americans, and American Indians—to defer their dreams of equality and teach them to remain contentedly within their assigned, subordinate places. Another educator, Richard Pratt, was, like Armstrong, a commander of African American troops during the Civil War. He admired Armstrong's pedagogy, sent some of his American Indian war captives to Hampton, and later established the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Pratt's educational mission was, in his words, to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man." Armstrong agreed and gave that brand of miseducation a practical rationale: it is cheaper to civilize Indians than to exterminate them. As the African American educator Carter Woodson concluded, when you control a person's thinking, you will not need to fear any opposition or uprising. Miseducation inculcates obedience.¹⁸

But education can also inspire rebellion. That was a motivation for masters to forbid literacy and learning among their enslaved laborers. The master's tools can enslave as well as free. Students of the TWLF had liberation in mind when they engaged in the fight for a "national culture," which, Fanon explained, was nothing less than the creation of a people who had been denied a history and culture. Consciousness, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire added, can be developed through a "pedagogy of the oppressed," which humanizes teachers and students alike and disrupts the relation of teacher as



colonizer and student as colonized. Contrary to miseducation, that dialogic pedagogy generates consciousness and intervention, critical thinking and action, creating subjects (not objects) who are agents of history, rendering them "truly human."

Discussion of the formation of that subject or subjectification follows in chapter 6. While Freirian consciousness grounds the subject within society, humanism of the (European) Enlightenment extolled the primacy of the person over self's others. "I think, therefore, I am" is the optimistic, positivist, rationalist formulation of the self—the center—and with that apprehension, humanism. Humans, the discourse maintains, have the ability to shape their own destinies and possess the power to rule over and even subdue nature, an idea later called speciesism. Not all humans, however, were equal; in fact, nonwhites and white women might approach but could never achieve the capacities and hence rights of white men. That humanism consorted with racism, patriarchy, and imperialism to justify and advance nationalism, conquest, colonialism, exploitation, and the capitalist world-system. Although Fanon and the TWLF advocated a "new humanism," whether old or new, humanism is a discourse of imperialism and colonialism.

Post-Enlightenment (European) intellectuals offered trenchant criticisms of humanism's sovereign subjects. Humans are not completely autonomous. Marx argues that class relations shape consciousness, and Freud reveals the unconscious dimensions of the self that are inaccessible to thought. Ferdinand de Saussure contends that nothing exists outside of language; thus language structures consciousness and the subject. Jacques Lacan finds that the subject is created through language in a process called subjectification, and Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault point to the state and its apparatuses in the production of the subject. Discourse, which is language and ideology, Foucault explains, constitutes the subject, and, accordingly, subjects are variants of discourse. Those insights of structuralism and poststructuralism, not humanism, supply Third World studies with its analytical category, the subject of subjectification.

As noted, race and ethnicity were the distinguishing features of race relations and (Chicago) ethnic studies, and both discourses function to maintain the relations of power. At the time of the TWLF, (Chicago) ethnic studies was the prevailing ideology in US society. That is, races were reduced to cultures, and the celebration of ethnicity and diversity was the ticket to the big tent of national inclusion, citizenship, and rights—the perceived goals of the civil rights movement. For the ruling class ethnicity ensured domestic tranquility. As the US sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain, their

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theory of racial formation, examined in chapter 7, arose in opposition to that dominance of the ethnicity-based model in sociology and theories of class and nation, and it swept the newly instituted field misnamed (post-1968) ethnic studies. Racial formation theory contends that race is persistent, central, and irreducible within US history and society because race is a creation of and, in turn, exerts influences over economic, political, and social forces—the sum total of society and the nation-state. At the same time race is a social construction and historical and is thus in motion, always in formation. Racial formation theory, I add, is particularly germane to settler colonies and nation-states because of the imperialism and colonialism that bred them and their demography, land, and labor.

In a complementary work the social and political philosopher Charles Mills argues that philosophy, like US sociology, glosses over race despite its long-standing and pervasive presence in the writings of major figures of the (European) Enlightenment, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant. That failure, which is an "episteme of ignorance," circulates within the "racial contract" that is at the heart of not merely modern social contract theory but the regimes of slavery and colonialism. By "racial contract" Mills refers to the assumption of superior whites and inferior nonwhites that enshrines mastery for whites and subservience for nonwhites. Whiteness, accordingly, is not simply a race or color but a set of power relations—the discursive and material powers of whites over nonwhites.

Whiteness in fact is the starting point of racial formation theory; whites named themselves and their inferior others. Critical race theory builds on that insight. The *critical* in critical race theory arises from critical theory's rejection of structuralism, materialism, and positivism in the disillusionment that followed World War I. The nineteenth century's faith in science, capitalism, and human progress was shaken by that European conflict, and the sovereign nation-state and its instruments were revealed as oppressive of the masses. Neo-Marxism and socialism, critical theory believed, offered solutions to the problems of capitalism and materialism, and deconstruction in literary criticism considered texts, like self and society, as constructed and mediated. Critical legal studies adopted critical theory's positions on power, ideology, discourse, and the material conditions, but its failure to consider race and racism as central to the constitution of legal theory and practice led to the emergence of critical race theory. As a pivotal apparatus of the state, the law, while complex and contingent, creates race and racial meanings and confers privileges and poverties, according to critical race theory. Whiteness, then, is property (capital) and the protected category, although assumed and

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thereby rendered invisible in the racial contract. Critical whiteness studies aims to expose that racial contract and deconstruct white power by making it visible.

White nationalism, resurgent and rampant during this book's writing, illustrates the centrality and persistence of race from the US settler nationstate's founding to our time. While a foundational and enduring feature, especially of settler colonies and nation-states, race is not the entirety of the social formation or society and the locations and articulations of power. Whiteness and nationalism are racial formations but are also multiply and intersectionally constituted as formations of gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and citizenship. Those qualities and abilities and, as a consequence rights, authorized by divine and natural law, are possessions, properties as understood through sovereignty (the sovereign nation-state and sovereign self) and capitalism, but also patriarchy as established by English common law in what became the US settler state. Theorizing liberation requires that wide-ranging comprehension of power and society.

Third World women (organic) intellectuals led the search for a new language to express and theory to explain their everyday experiences as women of color, queers, the poor, and migrants. The problems they faced were more nuanced and complicated than the answers provided by racial formation theory alone. In 1968 the African American feminist Frances Beal outlined the impact of racism, sexism, and capitalism on the lives of African American women. She then formed the Black Women's Liberation Caucus, which evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance because "the complexities of intersecting oppressions [are] more resilient than the distinctions of the particular groups." That is, women of color, Third World women faced similar manifestations of "intersecting" oppressions and exploitation that cut across racialized divides. Moreover, Beal held, a Third World consciousness enabled a more powerful political movement for social change than one based on cultural nationalism. A shared condition of oppression and exploitation allowed for solidarities of resistance. That revolutionary idea is the subject of chapter 8.

Beal's concept of "intersecting oppressions," later theorized as intersectionality, is integral to my social formation theory.¹⁹ Other influences include Marxism's stress on the means and relations of production and its critique of capitalism, and critical theory's focus on power and its neo-Marxism, antipositivism, poststructuralism, and activism. Finally, social formation theory draws from the lived experiences of the subjects of Third World studies—the oppressed and exploited, the masses. Social formation theory purports to locate powers and their articulations to explain societies and their changes over

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space and time. Those powers, discursive and material, produce race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and nation and their hierarchies, expressed as binaries, of white and nonwhite, man and woman, straight and queer, abled and disabled, owner and worker, and citizen and alien.²⁰ Although power is suspect, diffuse, and constantly in motion, it has abilities and effects. Social formation theory thus insists on locating power to name the oppressors and the oppressed and to create alternative, liberating discourses and practices.

Liberation, the ceaseless work of Third World studies, requires a strategic mastery of the language and ideologies of the ruling class to engage and upend oppression and exploitation. But liberation also demands discourses and practices not of the master's creation. The aim of intersectionality and social formation theory is to articulate new languages, ideologies, and practices, which is the future of Third World studies. Awaiting us in that future are other worlds imbued with possibilities that we will only realize through sustained struggles.

A luta continua, or the struggle continues, is the admonition of chapter 9, which concludes this version of Third World studies. Both a closing and an opening, the chapter provides a synthesis of Third World studies with feminist and queer theories and (post-1968) ethnic studies, a critique of multiculturalism and postcolonialism, an archaeology and reconsideration of key ideas in (post-1968) ethnic studies and Third World studies, and an intellectual history of the global social formation.

In the synthesis I identify some features common to Third World studies and feminist, queer, and (post-1968) ethnic studies. Those discourses and movements for social change form parallels. They began as the pursuit of full membership and civil rights within the settler nation-state, and dissidents from those ranks moved to shift the objective from rights to self-determination and power. Discourses materialized in the performance, exposing and dismembering the normative, and the making of subjects, as explained by feminist, queer, and critical (dis)ability theories, enhance our understanding of society and subjectivity. In (post-1968) ethnic studies, to-pographies of land and labor constitute the common ground as shown by indigeneity and sovereignty in Native American studies; transnational community (Pan-Africanism) in African American studies; migrant labor in Asian American studies; and borderlands in Chicanx studies. Those discourses and practices unite as well as point to the particularities of each field, and they inform the Third World studies project.

Multiculturalism, an imposter, and postcolonialism, a blunt instrument, have descended from (post-1968) ethnic studies.²¹ The former extends the



idea of (national) cultures to everyone, not only people of color or women or gays, and that diversity is the nation's strength. Multiculturalism celebrates heritage, encourages communities, and teaches tolerance and the dignity and value of all peoples. The state and capital have adopted multiculturalism to produce value, involving contented citizens, productive workers, and eager consumers. In response, as we saw, critics charge that pluralism is divisive of union and that extolling the virtues of a group leads to hatred of others. Postcolonialism is diffuse but generally proposes to displace (post-1968) ethnic studies and relatedly Third World nationalisms. In that sense I understand postcolonialism as a critique of (post-1968) ethnic studies' binaries and essentialisms devoid of intellectual content or merit. In my view those criticisms are sound, but they are also ignorant and elitist; (post-1968) ethnic studies scholarship is too varied to reject with a single stroke. And from my reading, postcolonialism advances as well as retards our understanding of history and the material relations of neocolonialism, the world-system of nation-states, and the new imperialism. Its sharpness as discourse is thus dulled by its evident dismissal of the powers of nationalisms and imperialisms old and new.

A recapitulation of assumed truths provides a cautionary lesson about the terms we voice and their liberating as well as oppressive timbre. Those include our habitual and uncritical demands for (social) justice and self-determination and claims to agency. Moreover, while digging into the past, Third World studies must engage the present and imagine the future. From the old must emerge novel, truly liberating discourses and material conditions. To update the TWLF's articulation for its Third World studies curriculum, the initiative, in formation, will inspire, create, and nurture "a new language, a new ideology, a new world consciousness."

A luta continua, the struggle continues.

Summary

In 1998 and 1999, when a colleague proposed Latino studies and I, Asian American studies, at Columbia University, both undergraduate majors were quickly approved. They were almost certainly seen as ethnic or cultural studies of groups that added to the colors of multicultural, international Columbia and America. Later, by contrast, when I proposed a major in comparative ethnic studies and explained the field as a study of power in society, the college dean and chair of the undergraduate committee on instruction queried and chided me: "What is power?" While the dean might have been incapable of apprehending power in the abstract, he clearly knew how to wield it,

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keeping the proposal in limbo for three years by requiring evidence of the field's academic legitimacy and demanding several iterations of the proposal. The dean might have perhaps suspected the study of power by comparative ethnic studies as being potentially disruptive of the extant relations of power.

I recount that fairly recent past to underscore its parallels with the divergent receptions of ethnic studies (Chicago and post-1968) and Third World studies some thirty years earlier when the TWLF proposed a Third World curriculum. Faculty and administrators welcomed race relations for African Americans and (Chicago) ethnic studies for American Indians, Asians, and Latinxs while rejecting Third World studies. They had accomplices in (post-1968) ethnic studies faculty who fled the Third World for the United States, seeking asylum in civil rights and membership in the settler nation-state. Cultural nationalism and segregation into safe (and dangerous), self-contained cells of races named and interpellated by those with power defined the field called (post-1968) ethnic studies. In that acquiescence and insofar as they have become ends, like the independent Third World nation-state, and not a strategic, temporary choice in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, we have willingly complied with our subordination and expropriation.

I must stress, nonetheless, there are differences between (Chicago) race relations and ethnic studies and the misnamed (post-1968) ethnic studies, which adamantly opposed the former's race relations cycle, problem minorities, and solution of assimilation. And in the 1960s Black (and Brown, Red, and Yellow) Power threatened white supremacy even as independent Third World nation-states and the Non-Aligned Movement challenged European imperialism, colonialism, and racism. Cultural nationalism and the nation-state were effective vehicles toward self-determination but only as instruments in transit. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, conceived of that strategy as a mobile war of positions.

Also, (post-1968) ethnic studies was endorsed by liberals but attacked by those threatened by its institutionalization. And dissent from within has challenged the field that has become the prevailing norm and standard. To distinguish themselves from that normative version of ethnic studies, at a founding conference held in 2011, the organizers referred to their scholarship and practice as "critical ethnic studies." The error of the "Third World Liberation Front model," they recalled, is the convening and enfolding of disparate intellectual traditions under a single institutional and subject rubric called ethnic studies. Moreover, ethnic studies, situated within neoliberal colleges and universities, educates "global citizens" through the study of domesticated differences and multiculturalism. Critical ethnic studies, by contrast, opens



"a field of political-intellectual struggle with dynamic, multiple, and radically divergent focal points." Uneven and not owned, critical ethnic studies is "an impulse" stirred by "a radical intellectual openness" wherein the "critical" marks the urgency of the moment, both vital and precarious. ²² The critical, then, unlike critical race theory, does not descend from critical theory, and despite its critique of the TWLF "model" and normative ethnic studies, critical ethnic studies retains the name without commentary.

Remarkably, that account of (post-1968) ethnic studies as a field composed of separate programs and intellectual traditions of African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American studies assembled uncomfortably under the generic brand ethnic studies comes from a generation nearly fifty years removed from the founding moment. Instead, I believe, Third World studies as conceived by the TWLF began as a coherent, unified project that arose from the global revolutions that transformed some four hundred years of world history. The descent and disintegration into the national cultures of (post-1968) ethnic studies, a gift of administrators and faculty, was a deviation, a curbing of the monumental struggles against imperialism, capitalism, colonialism, and racism, or the (European) problem of the twentieth century.

Critical ethnic studies revives the activism and progressive politics that, in the 1960s and 1970s, opposed (post-1968) ethnic studies as institutionalized shorn of its radical edges. And new, innovative, and courageous scholarship cut across disciplines and, while not written under the sign of (post-1968) ethnic studies, have advanced the field called ethnic studies. Notable are labors that violate the racialized borders of (post-1968) ethnic studies, revealing the need for such crossings while offering a critique of the fields' subject divides. Such comparative studies require a profound respect for and deep readings in the (post-1968) ethnic studies fields involved, and they, like intersectional work, articulate a language that is often unintelligible to particular study formations, but they point the way toward a more profound and generous capacity to know and act.²³

While theorizing liberation, we might simultaneously (re)imagine it. As the anticolonialist Aimé Césaire astutely observed: "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge." Gaston Bachelard, a philosopher of science and one of Michel Foucault's teachers, recalled how he had to forget his learning and break from his habits of philosophical research in order to apprehend "the problems posed by the poetic imagination." In this environment, he writes, "the cultural past doesn't count." Instead, we must be receptive to "the image at the moment it appears . . . in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image." That poetic image, that "poetics of space," has a

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dynamism, a power of its own, inducing "sudden salience on the surface of the psyche" and "reverberation." The US historian Robin D. G. Kelley connects that epistemology of the imagination with the struggles for new spaces, new topographies, "In the poetics of struggle and lived experience," he writes in beauty, "in the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born." ²⁶

Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation is a conjuring, a haunting from a past that refuses to die. The spirit of the Third World anti-imperial, anticolonial struggles for self-determination and antiracism lives on. In this articulation of the formation, Third World studies retains the original drive for liberation and extends the struggle to all forms of oppression and exploitation, discursive and material. This introduction merely begins a conversation. As such Third World Studies invites dialogue and engagement, affirmation and debate. Only then, in the articulation and practice of language and ideology, will Third World studies comprise a formation of inquiry and action worthy of its student founders and their magnificent, enduring cause and movement, making history.



Notes

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- I Similarly, at the national level, the White House's Office of Management and Budget, on September 4, 2020, notified federal agencies to stop diversity training, which it stated was "divisive, anti-American propaganda." That was followed by the president's "Executive Order on Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping," dated September 22, 2020, "to promote unity" and "to combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating."
- 2 On August 22, 2017, federal judge A. Wallace Tashima determined that the state of Arizona acted with discriminatory intent in shutting down Mexican American studies in the Tucson Unified School District, depriving students of their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights.
- 3 This censorship follows a long-standing practice by US prison officials who cull books read by prisoners.
- 4 The "human condition" is not humanism or speciesism, which I critique and reject as reductive centrisms.
- 5 I use the designation "(post-1968) ethnic studies" to distinguish this variety of ethnic studies from the earlier, originating ethnic studies of the Chicago school of sociology, as I explain later in this introduction.
- 6 As I write in the 2020s, this priority is especially evidenced in police brutality against black men and women and, in resistance, the Black Lives Matter movement, the COVID-19 pandemic's heavy toll on black (and brown, i.e., Latinx, American Indian, and Pacific Islander) bodies, and the attacks against black studies in the schools.
- 7 I subscribe to *Latinx*, a nongendered form of *Latina/o* that implicates race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation and their intersections. Similarly, later in the book I use *Filipinx* instead of *Filipina/o*.
- 8 I came to critical (dis)ability studies much later at the urging of some of my best students.

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- 9 While I understand the need to define Third World studies as a field, I reject the idea of disciplines with their norms, rituals, members, hierarchies, and borders. Instead, I consider Third World studies a formation.
- 10 As reported of remarks by the US president in the Washington Post, January 12, 2018.
- 11 Washington Post, November 15, 2022.
- 12 On US Christian nationalism, see Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*; Gorski, *American Covenant*. On the English and US settler claims of Christianity and civilization against savages and infidels, see Rana, *Two Faces of American Freedom*.
- 13 Two books, Jean Raspail, Camp of Saints (1973), and Renaud Camus, Le Grand Remplacement (2011), have been influential among US white and Christian nationalists for their "great replacement theory" or "genocide by substitution" whereby Islam and migrants of color flood France and extinguish French culture and civilization.
- 14 Unsurprising, thus, is originalism, or a return to the meanings and intents of constitutional law as they were conceived, especially by the founding fathers. During the Reagan years (the 1980s), originalism was a way to take back the courts from the liberalism of the civil rights (involving race, gender, and sexuality) era.
- 15 I explain this in my memoir, Boundless Sea 沖廣.
- 16 This articulation of Third World studies diverges from but acknowledges the examinations of Third World politics in the United States, the influences of Third World theories and practices on Third World movements and arts in the United States, and political and cultural interactions and solidarities between Third World peoples in the United States and those in the Third World. See, e.g., Smethurst, Black Arts Literary Movement; Pulido, Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left; Young, Soul Power; Luis-Brown, Waves of Decolonization; Gómez, Revolutionary Imaginings; Ishizuka, Serve the People; Mahler, From the Tricontinental.
- 17 For a contrary account of self-determination and its fall, see Getachew, Worldmaking after Empire.
- 18 Teachers were trained in "normal" schools, indicating their purpose, which was to teach to norms, or conformity.
- 19 See also Ferguson's "queer of color critique" in Aberrations in Black, 149, where he describes the social formation as "the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class."
- 20 As I explain in chapter 8, the words abled and disabled reference their social constructedness.
- 21 In fact, multiculturalism is as old as the US settler nation-state, and postcolonialism claims an intellectual ancestry that extends beyond (post-1968) ethnic studies. I am simply referring to the contemporary versions of both.
- 22 Critical Ethnic Studies Collective, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 2–4; Elia et al., *Critical Ethnic Studies*.
- 23 Two exemplary studies are Miles, Ties That Bind, and Karuka, Empire's Tracks.
- 24 Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge," 134.
- 25 Bachelard, Poetics of Space, xv, xvi.
- 26 Kelley, Freedom Dreams, 9-10.



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