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INTRODUCTION

Anthropology of White Supremacy

Jemima Pierre, Junaid Rana, and Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús

ON JANUARY 6, 2021, a group of armed insurrectionists supporting the losing incumbent, US president Donald J. Trump, stormed the Capitol—the seat of government—to halt the certification of the election of Joseph Biden. In addition to attacking police and destroying property, some of the rioters brandished Confederate and neo-Nazi flags, along with other recognized white supremacist symbolism.¹ One New Jersey man convicted of storming the Capitol had shaved his mustache to look like Adolf Hitler. This rioter was caught on camera declaring, “The revolution will be televised!”² From Viking costumes to “hail Trump” signs, Auschwitz sweatshirts to a noose and galley set up outside the capitol grounds,³ it was clear that, among the hodgepodge of rioters, many were drawing on the cultural symbolism of white supremacy even as they claimed to only be challenging the election results.

As the December 2022 congressional report on the “Attacks on the U.S. Capitol” demonstrated, a good number of participants were from white nationalist and neofascist groups, such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. Other reports show that a broad swath of the January 6 rioters—including those not specifically linked to the fringe neo-Nazi groups—were motivated by racism and white resentment.⁴ But this was not white resentment and discontent borne solely of the economic malaise of the white working poor. It was clear that the riots were a cross-class event. Contemporary white discontent within the United States should not be understood as a minority position—especially as Donald Trump received more than seventy-four million votes during the elections, the great majority of the US white population. The wide-scale support for Trump and the January 6 rioters is a reflection of the current state of US race relations. In fact, scholars have pointed to the increasing popularity of the “Great Replacement” theory among US and other Western white populations as an example of how these racist sentiments are cross-cutting (Beydoun Sediqe 2023). The Great Replacement theory is a “neofascist-white supremacist belief that white Americans are in danger of ‘white genocide’ and becoming a minority in their own country because of demographic change and an intentional effort by liberal and Democratic leaders to ‘replace’ the ‘real’ white America with

immigrants” and other people of color.⁵ This theory is fueling what some would say is an already established “right-wing populism,” which was tapped by Trump and his campaign.⁶ We saw the invocation of the replacement theory during the shocking 2017 Charlottesville tiki march and riot where the large group of white men were chanting, “You will not replace us!” Thus, whereas earlier understandings of white supremacy depended on, dare we say “classic” examples, such as Jim Crow segregation, apartheid South Africa, or Hitler’s Nazi movement, it seems that many people currently associate white supremacy with iterations of white nationalist and neo-Nazi groupings, high-profile acts of racial terrorism, and a growing right-wing ideological discourse around white population displacement.

We argue in this book, however, that white supremacy is, in the words of the late philosopher Charles W. Mills, “institutionalized white power.” Of course, it is important to recognize the disturbing and dangerous resurgence of white racist hate groups, racial terror, and racist ideology. And, importantly, this resurgence of white racist hate groups is not only in the United States but also in other settler states, and especially in European countries. But to accept these as the sole representations of white supremacy is to not only exceptionalize these movements and tie them to specific times and (Western) places, but it is to also minimize the understanding of the ways our contemporary world has been organized around a racialized hierarchy in which humanity and civilization are defined by whiteness and Europeanness.

Along with many other scholars, we argue that white supremacy is a global political, economic, and cultural system in which those racialized as “white” have power and control resources. It is a system that “includes ‘conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement,’ as well ‘relations of white dominance and non-white subordination’ reenacted ‘daily across a broad array of institutions and social settings’” (Ansley 2010). This system is a global scheme of “institutionalized white power” consolidated through the brutalities of European expansion that led to African enslavement, near indigenous extirpation, and the Western military, political, and cultural domination of the rest of the world. This expansion was then justified, in the early nineteenth century, by a racial science that promulgated the idea of white racial superiority and nonwhite racial inferiority. The idea that European, “Western” culture, and, by extension, white people, are superior, is so deeply ingrained in our world that it configures everything from international governance to beauty standards. From what is considered the highest form of culinary training (French cuisine) to the way that international finance capital operates, white supremacy is firmly entrenched in the organization of global political and cultural structures.

Recognizing that white supremacy structures the world requires the identification that, “whiteness is a metaphor for power” (Baldwin and Peck 2017) and the understanding of the various ways that this power pervades all social, political, cultural, and economic realities of nonwhite racialized peoples across the planet. By naming whiteness and analyzing white supremacy as central to local and global sociopolitical formations, this volume challenges the tendency to only see white supremacy in localized terms and in identity categories, or only as represented through specific Western white nationalist groups.

Historicizing and Theorizing White Supremacy

What, exactly, is white supremacy? How did it emerge? How is it mobilized and made so powerful? We begin with the basic claim that it is not possible to understand white supremacy—as a concept and ideology, a set of material practices, and a structure of power—without recognizing its relationship to the ideology of race, the belief in hierarchical racial difference, and the complex and uneven practices of race formation. The relations of power that scaffold white supremacy were established not only through the colonization of the Americas and dispossession of First Nations, as well as the enslavement of Africans, but also through the classification and ordering of peoples based on presumed racial difference. The global economic and political system that emerged was dependent on this difference, where the construction of race meant a hierarchical relationship to power with the category “white” on top. At the same time, it must be remembered that, at the height of its appropriation, race was a “catchall” that included physical, cultural, and linguistic elements as well as qualities of “civilization” (Stocking 1993). Race, in other words, “is always a description of a social, historical, cultural, and political position” (Pierre and Beliso-De Jesús 2021, 250); significantly, race is also, to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1994), the modality through which other structures of power, including class, gender, religion, and ethnicity, are enacted and lived. And even as racial meanings could be malleable and shifting in various contexts, the presumed “white” race (and whiteness) was constructed—and then considered—as superior in every aspect. This valorization of whiteness and the ideologies and practices that consecrate its power enable the creation of material realities of inequality, racial oppression, and hierarchies as well as the acceptance of “white-framed interpretations, “white-imposed community norms,” scientific and medical categorizations, racial images and ideologies of science and popular culture, among other things (Pierre and Beliso-De Jesús 2021).

We focus on white supremacy instead of only race or racism to demonstrate the point to a centrality of whiteness—as power—to the construction of the racialized modern world. We argue that for change to occur in these relations of power it is important for us to, first, acknowledge that the frames of white supremacy produce the very hierarchies, from “savage” to “civilized,” that have placed whiteness on top. These hierarchies have led to a self-fulfilling prophecy of global white governance and nonwhite subordination, but also to the maintenance of white power in places and by those not racialized-as-white. Thus, for example, relationships and conflicts within and between nonwhite communities and nations (such as internal conflicts on the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) are shaped by the history of white supremacy and the world made through European colonialism, chattel slavery, and indenture. White supremacy also governs global standards and, as we will see in this book, impact capital accumulation, territoriality, notions of “good” versus “bad” governance, credit worthiness, and local economies.

We must also acknowledge anti-Blackness as a core feature of white supremacy. Blackness (and Africanness) is constructed as the extreme opposite of whiteness—from racial science where Africans were deemed as a separate species from Europeans to travelogues

and literary representations of Africans as beasts or, specifically, apes (Jordan 1968)—and Black people, particularly Black Africans, as the antithesis of civilized humanity. It is also important to note that white supremacy manifests as anti-Blackness within other nonwhite communities through anti-Black views such as colorism, even within majority Black communities. White supremacy also often manifests as “white adjacency”—where some in non-Black communities align with whiteness and buy into the racial hierarchy to gain proximity to whiteness to distance themselves from Black people (and, sometimes, their own communities) presumably to have access to the privileges that whiteness affords. Moreover, understanding white supremacy as a structure with varied processes demands recognition also of structural whiteness. Structural whiteness means that racialized relations of power occur both in tandem with and in excess of the corporeal. In other words, those racialized-as-white are not the only ones that can enact white supremacy. Others, non-whites, can also invoke or participate in structural whiteness, projecting and performing its attributes with varying degrees of consciousness (Pierre 2013; see also Hesse 2007).

The essays in this reader demonstrate the various ways that white supremacy is deployed and takes its hold across the planet. White supremacy is global because it points to the *racial* dimensions of an international power system that emerges from the history of colonialism and imperialism and includes an intertwined ideology of white racial superiority and the ubiquity of capitalism as a racialized force. For example, we cannot honestly make sense of climate disasters over the last few centuries without understanding the historical and contemporary workings of white supremacy. The concept of the “Anthropocene,” which refers to the geological age defined by human dominance, cannot be truly rendered without situating how European humans dominate and control the world. Global climate change, for instance, was affected by how European settlers killed fifty-six million indigenous people in the Americas and effectively changed carbon levels, cooling the atmosphere.⁷ Indeed, rather than the Anthropocene, as Renya Ramirez argues in this reader, we should understand this instigation of the “capitalocene” as the ever-present, yet hidden, “Colonialocene” situated at the heart of the system of global white supremacy.

By explicitly examining how whiteness is constructed as a clear power position and establishing the role of white supremacy in both historical and contemporary structures of power, this reader offers an expansion on analyses of race, racialization, and racism.

Anthropology and the Making of White Supremacy

One of the key interventions of this reader is to demonstrate the significance of the discipline of anthropology to the construction of race and the consolidation of white supremacy. The history and ideological foundation of white supremacy can be traced to the emergence of the discipline and the study of race. But to understand this history, we must, even if briefly, historicize race and racism. The racial colonial order that established white, European ethnocentrism as the epitome of civilization solidified over a very long period from the 1400s (Sanjek 1994). What emerged from European conquest, indigenous dispossession, and African enslavement was the naturalization of the social status of the

conquered as biological difference. By the early eighteenth century, this naturalization was codified in what would become Western “science.” At this point, race emerged as a concept to make sense of the diversity of human phenotypes and behavior along the lines of hierarchical difference. With the early works of European scientists such as the Swede Carolus Linnaeus and the German Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, biological variation was “used to develop universal taxonomies for classifying human populations” (Harrison 2024). As Faye Harrison notes, these “differences were linked to social and moral characteristics that stereotyped and rank-ordered the world’s population in a global hierarchy” (Harrison 2024). This was the high point of racial science, where human groups were divided into five racial groupings—Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malayan—all based on the material relationships that defined the conquerors and the conquered and enslaved. This would lead to further refinements of racial science, particularly with the rise of the use of anthropometric measurements.

What is called the “American School of Anthropology” would soon emerge through the work of Samuel Morton, who deployed anthropometric measurements of brain size to consolidate the idea of biological differences between humans that justified European cultural and racial supremacy. Morton focused on measuring skull capacity for his ranking of races, “with the Caucasoid at the top, the Mongoloid in the middle, and the Negroid at the bottom” (Harrison 2022). One of the most popular of the polygenists, Morton believed that human races were separate species. At the time, the polygenists were in a debate with monogenists, who believed that because of divine creation by God, all humans were united by a single origin. Polygenists, on the other hand, believed in multiple species origin for humans, which for them crystallized in a presumed racial order. Significantly, both groups were wedded to the idea of European superiority and the inferiority of all other beings, especially Africans. Morton was joined by the likes of anatomist Louis Agassiz, J. C. Nott, and G. R. Gliddon, and other leaders in the professionalization of anthropology in the United States, such as physical anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (Blakey 1987).

Racial science was not only limited to the United States. The racializing consequences of African enslavement and the near-genocidal disenfranchisement of indigenous populations in Africa, the Americas, and Asia were global. Even as specific European national traditions arose in the classification of human difference in anthropology, by the early nineteenth century, all early anthropological traditions subscribed to the idea of race as a natural difference that determined a racial hierarchy of humans (Pels 2000). As we have demonstrated elsewhere, “anthropology’s scientific racism had tremendous impact around the world, not only influencing the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century, but also in helping to entrench the view of African and Indigenous inferiority, as well as the inferiority of others” (Beliso-De Jesús, Pierre, and Rana 2023, 420). The dehumanization of people through the construction of racial categories within a hierarchy cannot be overstated.

Of course, anthropology’s racial science was challenged from the beginning by many. Scholars of African descent, such as Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin (2002) and US abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1854), argued against polygenism and the

hierarchization of race. Yet, the challenges these Black scholar-activists made to racial science are not as well documented within the discipline as the interventions of Franz Boas, who is considered the “father” of US anthropology. Boas is understood to have provided a radical break with anthropology’s racialist assumptions with his theoretical shift from “race” to “culture.” Boas critiqued the entrenched legacy of evolutionism in the discipline advocating for the study of culture. By developing an anthropological method that focused on internal cultural change in different groups, Boas argued for an embrace of cultural relativism, the idea that all cultures have inherent value and should be examined on their own terms (Stocking 1968). However, Boas’s move away from explicit racial science did not necessarily mean the disavowal of the concept of race as biology (Visweswaran 1998). Rather, as Stocking has argued, it was mostly a shift in terms where “culture” replaced “race” or “race temperament” in analysis (Stocking 1968). The Boasian separation of race, language, and culture resulted in the various subfields of anthropology: biological/archaeology, linguistic, cultural/social fields within the broader discipline of anthropology. Boas’s shift of anthropological analysis of human difference from biology to culture produced what has been seen as a US (antiracist) cultural approach. These methods propagated by Boas’s students, including Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Ashley Montagu, insisted that the race concept (biological approaches) was not adequate for understanding societies. Instead, they argued, the focus ought to be on understanding internal patterns of cultural change over time (Mead 1934).

European anthropological traditions also moved away from earlier evolutionism. By the early twentieth century, the categories of European anthropological analysis were not specifically about culture but instead emphasized social structures. In these traditions, the focus shifted to society as a structured whole, made up of related elements that functioned together. French ethnology as well as British social anthropology stressed the relations of social structures, where the likes of Émile Durkheim pushed for an understanding of the integral nature of social structure (structuralism) and those of Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown on “structural-functionalism,” where societies were treated as living organisms. While the European traditions seemed counter to the cultural emphasis of US anthropology, the two traditions were nevertheless mutually reinforcing, particularly in the disavowal (or the diminishing) of the evolutionism that marked the racialized hierarchization of world populations.

Both the Boasians and the European liberal anthropologists of the early to middle twentieth century articulated—if not in word, but sentiment—a cultural relativism, a theory and method that advocated both the jettisoning of the ranking of cultures and the valorization of non-Western cultures. This “antiracist” cultural relativism, however, also reenforced racial difference such that the theory and method of relativism continued to depend on a racialized and racializing hierarchy of races and cultures, with the white European, at the top (Baker 2021). This can be seen from Boas’s “salvage” ethnographies of Indigenous cultural practices to Malinowski’s “functionalism” that worked in tandem with British indirect rule and colonial knowledge formation.

The Boasian intervention has had far-reaching influence in anthropology, particularly its North American articulations, and beyond. We must remember here the critiques of Kamala Visweswaran (1998) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) who argued separately that the use of culture as a replacement for race was more of a political, rather than a theoretical, move, as it was merely a shift in terms and not a result of rigorous analysis and discussion. Visweswaran argues that this shift emerged out of an antiracist liberalism that advocated the study and preservation of culture, while reifying race and white racial domination (Visweswaran 1998; 2010). Indeed, Lee Baker (2021, 128) also demonstrates how, in his promotion of biological assimilation as a solution to US race relations, Boas also supported an Americanization movement that “fueled the hegemony of white supremacy.” As a result, mainstream anthropology’s continued inability to address race is linked to the Boasian assignment of race to biology and defining culture as “not race.”

The critique of this Boasian shift to culture remains, however contentious, even today (Trouillot 2003). Boasian paradigms of examining culture instead of race is deeply entrenched in current anthropological approaches. For example, renewed calls for a return to the Boasian concept of culture in contradistinction to analyses of race and racism are part of this legacy (Bashkow 2004). It is important to map the discipline’s epistemic attachments to ideas of “culture” as a substitute to tackling difficult conversations on its origins in racism and racial science, and the consolidation of white supremacy. The concepts of “ethnicity” or even the designation of “ethnic group” as tools of and categories of analysis, for example, remain a steadfast part of the terminology and structures of engagement used in (North American) anthropological research. In this process, an obscuring of an analysis of race and white supremacy happens through the deployment of culture. There is an implicit disavowal of race that does not allow room to explore how the deployment of culture is itself often racialized. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, “ethnicity” is often used as a stand-in for “race,” confirming Brackette Williams’s (1989) classic point that such concepts as “tribe” and “ethnicity” are only labels for the different aspect of the same historical and sociopolitical process through which the world is structured. There is a trained inability to understand the role of race and white supremacy as core features of anthropology’s methods and theory. This reader reveals how race, processes of racialization, and white supremacy are constitutive of all modern relations, and, therefore, also, disciplinary formations. To understand the current intensification of explicitly white supremacist acts of violence and discourses from an anthropological perspective then means to not exceptionalize these cases. Instead, this reader demonstrates how we must highlight how the *long durée* of white supremacy is a structuring component of all these political, economic, cultural, and social relations.

Faye Harrison (2024) reminds us that the Boasian agenda was “not the only antiracist trajectory to influence anthropology.” W. E. B. DuBois, for example, challenged racial determinism from the beginning of the twentieth century, producing critical antiracist analysis in the Black “vindicationist” tradition (Foster 1997). The first generation of African diaspora anthropologists, such as W. Montague Cobb, Caroline Bond Day, and W. Allison Davis, used anthropological tools as well as other interdisciplinary frameworks against

rampant biological determinism and racism. And, over the years, against mainstream anthropology's reluctance to engage race as a category of analysis, it has been primarily scholars of color who challenged early racial science *and* advocated the need to understand the significance and workings of race. We cannot forget, therefore, William Willis Jr.'s famous indictment in the essay, "Skeletons in the Anthropological Closet," that argued that anthropology is the "social science that studies dominated colored people—and their ancestors—living outside the boundaries of modern white societies" (Willis Jr. 1972, 123). The main point is that anthropology, despite (or, perhaps, because of) its claims of liberalism, actually "essentialized difference across the color line, misrecognized the pervasiveness of racism, and perpetuated white imperial power" (Anderson 2019, 164). These scholars have called for anthropology to not only understand global structures of race and power but to address its role in the construction and maintenance of white supremacy (Allen and Jobson 2016; Harrison 1995, 1998, 2012; Costa Vargas 2004; Mullings 2004; Spears 2014; Pierre 2020, 2013). Yet, we must acknowledge that much of the work on white supremacy has been cultivated outside of anthropology, principally by Black studies, Indigenous studies, and critical and race and ethnic studies (e.g., DuBois 1899; Frederickson 1981; Higginbotham 1992; hooks 2000; Jung 2015; Jung and Vargas 2011; Koshy et al. 2022; Lipsitz 2006; Leonardo 2004; Marable 2000; Mills 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Omi and Winant 2015; Rodriguez 2021; Silva 2007; Warren and Twine 2008). Sociology has also made significant contributions to the analysis of white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Ferber 2007). It is long overdue for anthropology to include in its critical examination how white supremacy structures the world.

Anthropology of White Supremacy

In the summer of 2023, the membership of the American Anthropological Association overwhelmingly voted to join the boycott of Israeli academic institutions, joining the call by Palestinians for international solidarity in their struggle for liberation.⁸ Following significant debate within the organization and informed by decades of scholarship and political advocacy, the position of boycott is an important direction toward decolonizing anthropology and taking a principled stance against settler colonialism, genocide, and apartheid.⁹

Shortly thereafter on October 7, 2023, a joint attack by Palestinian resistance groups in Israeli-settled towns across the border from Gaza led to the killing of 1,200 and the abduction of more than 200 Israelis as hostages.¹⁰ This was followed by an unrelenting barrage by the Israeli military in Gaza that through June 2024 led to the deaths of over 40,000 civilians, injured nearly 90,000, with thousands missing (including 21,000 children),¹¹ displacing nearly two million inhabitants of Gaza, and the abduction and imprisonment more than 9,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and an unknown number from Gaza.¹² The basic infrastructural damage includes over 60 percent residential, 80 percent commercial, and 88 percent of educational buildings.¹³ All twelve universities in Gaza were bombed and destroyed, depriving almost 90,000 students of their rights to education and inflicting catastrophic damage to Palestinian culture and

knowledge.¹⁴ Access to water and basic food has been denied, not only by the Israeli government, but also the active disruption of supplies by Israeli settlers, which is leading to the condition of famine.¹⁵

Despite the claims by Israeli officials to self-defense, on December 29, 2023, South Africa filed an application in the International Court of Justice charging Israel with committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.¹⁶ In accordance with international law and the conventions of protection of occupied people of Palestine, the Israeli government has been charged with intentional and deliberate use of genocide to punish the civilian population of Gaza. The intervention of a postapartheid South Africa is an indictment on the history of settler colonialism and the use of genocidal violence by Israel on the Palestinian people. For anthropologists who have advocated for Palestinians and witnessed this brutal catastrophe, this devastation by the Israeli military in Gaza should be considered, in the words of the International Court of Justice, “plausible genocide.”¹⁷

Israel has carried out land seizure and the annihilation of the Palestinian people as part of its logic of becoming a modern nation-state (Khalidi 2020; Masalha 2021; Pappé 2007; Wiezman 2007), which is part of the longer continuation of European settler colonialism across the world (Wolfe 2016). That the Israeli settler colonialism, occupation, and practices of apartheid are uneasily connected to white supremacy is part of how Israeli nationalism has undone critical thinking and dissent.¹⁸ Indeed, years ago, Edward Said described Palestine as America’s last “taboo” (2000).¹⁹ Structural white supremacy is at the heart of modern projects of settler colonialism (Inwood and Bonds 2016), which are defined through a liberal racialized white privilege that provides certain states with the right to practice genocide, apartheid, and the dispossession of indigenous people’s land (Wolfe 2006).

As this recent example demonstrates, an anthropology of white supremacy must, first, take the history of European expansion and the political, intellectual, cultural, and ideological sedimentation of presumed white superiority as given and recognize the impact of that history on the political positions and social practices of the communities with which we work.

Second, and consequent to the recognition of this history, is the understanding of white supremacy as global. In this sense, we can see how the persistent investment, privilege, and power of whiteness is central to the world as we know it, and how white supremacy is structural, pervasive, and, indeed, mundane. This means that the history and structures of white supremacy inform institutions, habits, laws, policies, representations, pleasures, desires, and so on.

Third, considering its global history, white supremacy cannot be examined solely as narrow forms of identity formation and a focus only on local extremist groups. To be sure, there are extremist white nationalist and fascist groupings advocating white supremacy (and as we have seen, even the localized white nationalist groupings are part of transnational white supremacist movements), but these groups must be examined as just one of white supremacy’s many manifestations.

Fourth, we must also remember that white supremacy is the modality through which many social and political relationships are lived. It is clear, for example, that racism, patriarchy, settler colonialism, and capitalism differentially affect nonwhite and white people.

Even gender and race subordination are experienced differently by varied groups because they are uniquely positioned within structures of white supremacy. Relationships of class, ethnicity/nationality, sexuality, among other factors, are necessarily altered by the overarching reality in their different manifestations of white domination (Mills 2007).

Fifth, anthropology must reckon with its role in the development of white supremacy. Anthropology is the discipline that gave us racial science and which was foundational to the consolidation of global white supremacy. We insist, therefore, that anthropology has a specific responsibility to address the consequences of this history through the examination of, not only the realities of global hierarchical relations, but also the ways that our institutions, theoretical models, and research practices continue to be shaped by racial logics and the privileges of whiteness. This means that an anthropology of white supremacy must come with a commitment to dismantling global structures of race and power.

Finally, we argue that a key part of this commitment to dismantling white supremacy must be a stance against Western imperialism and capitalist domination—both shaped by and through white supremacy. In other words, an anthropology of white supremacy must have the aim of “moving further toward an anthropology of liberation” (Harrison [1991] 1997).

We believe that the discipline of anthropology is primed for the careful study of the legacies and realities of white supremacy. Despite the troubling history and development of anthropology, radical anthropologists—especially those from communities who made up and continue to make up the bulk of the anthropology’s subjects—have been at the forefront of critical analysis of the discipline as well as the development of new methodological and theoretical innovations within the discipline. In this way, scholars can then draw on these innovations as well as some key trends within the discipline, from the focus on the mundane, the daily practices and cultural rituals, the linguistic and semiotic, the historical and archaeological, to critical social and political analysis. Anthropologists, as theorist ethnographers of everyday forms of power, can offer much to the project of dismantling racial inequality. Indeed, anthropology has a long history of public engagement that sought to intervene in the problems of racism and white supremacy. Yet, it is notable that anthropologists have receded from the public critique of racism and white supremacy in recent times due to several complex factors (Andersen 2019; Baker 2010; Price 2004, 2008), while critical race scholars and historians have continued to play an important role.²⁰

The *Anthropology of White Supremacy* reader situates white supremacy historically and analytically. The reader brings together anthropologists from across the world to examine white supremacy in local, national, and transnational contexts. From Okinawa to Senegal, Norway to Mexico, US to Palestine, the research in this reader examines the different forms, shapes, and contours of white supremacy as a core feature of the world in which we live. Challenging the Northern/Western/White epistemic hold on anthropological scholarship, we feature analysis of white supremacy that crosses different regions, areas, and subfields. Through an engaged practice, the scholars explore a range of approaches to the problem of white supremacy and its attendant ideological systems, making the case that a critique of white supremacy is also a critique of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. Contributions to this reader examine an anthropology of white supremacy that addresses

questions of indigeneity, anti-Black racism, imperialism and coloniality, sovereignty, xenophobia, homo- and transphobia, racism/antiracism, anti-Muslim racism, feminism, sexism, and patriarchy globally.

This reader expands the anthropological project by, first, expanding the breadth and scope of analysis to address global white supremacy. Second, featuring non-US/non-Western anthropologists, and third, emphasizing work that is committed to action-oriented and transformative agendas. In doing so, *Anthropology of White Supremacy* does not simply analyze white supremacy but aims to dismantle it. We make no claims that this reader is exhaustive. We feature a series of theoretical and methodological interventions along with ethnographic and methodological techniques that demonstrate the usefulness of different anthropological tools to understand and undo white supremacy. In this vein, several of our chapters shift away from a traditional ethnographic approach to explore the historical and discursive sites that structure white supremacy both in and outside of the discipline.

An overreliance on theoretical knowledge produced from the United States and Europe is also part of the maintenance of white supremacy and follows what Harrison (2016, 162) has described as an *epistemological apartheid*. This “theory-forming landscape” restricts knowledge production to imperialist, racial, and national spaces. And, even when that scholarship is produced by scholars of color, they too are situated from global centers of power. The Global South becomes a place of extraction used as a site of raw data and is not seen as a site from which theory is *made*. This form of “imperial globality,” grounded in “modernity, development practices, and white supremacy” is integral to the logics of academia dominated by the Global North (Harrison 2016, 172). Part of the work to undo white supremacy then, must also “desediment” this epistemological apartheid (Chandler 2013). To practice a decolonial anthropology we must read, teach, cite, and engage with the vast canon of global scholarship produced outside of North American and European power centers (Harrison 2016). Recognizing the various marginalized anthropologies that exist can begin to unravel concentric sites of oppression. However, even with a new generation of anthropologists who acknowledge that race matters, there are still many who will not recognize the structural system of white supremacy.

The Anthropology of White Supremacy reader is organized around thematic sections. In Section I, “Anthropology as White Supremacy,” we begin with the role of the discipline in the making and consolidation of white supremacy through examinations of Western science (Blakey), liberal philosophies (Rana), epistemologies (Pierre), and the upholding of whiteness as a position of power (Halvorson and Reno). Section II, “Empire, Colonialism, and White Supremacy,” draws on ethnographic work to examine historical and contemporary forms of imperial and colonial formations that continue the project of white supremacy. From how US settler capitalism structures the lives of Indigenous migrant women from Mexico and Central America (Speed), the strategic deployment of mestizaje and anti-Blackness in Mexico (Jerry), the deployment of whiteness in South Asia (Channa) and Senegal (de Sá), to how European feminism served colonialism in Africa (Rahier), this section examines how white supremacy operates through empire, colonialism, and imperialism.

We continue expanding our global approach in Section III, “White Supremacy as Global Currency,” which reveals how anthropological analysis can provide insight into the profitability and economies of white supremacy transnationally. For example, the essays demonstrate how the mining industry and finance capital in South Africa is reliant on anti-Black racial hierarchies and white supremacist forms of accumulation (Styve), as well as how extractivism in itself allows the construction and affirmation of whiteness in Nigeria through crude oil enclaves (Adunbi). The global currency of American multicultural advertising, how it is concerned with white consumers in the deployment of the term “diversity” (Shankar), or the ways institutional racism embeds white supremacy in Hollywood industries (Rosa and Díaz). The section also explores how whiteness is commodified globally by Nordic countries (Loftsdóttir), and how “white supremacist ways of knowing” operate in development discourses in Mali (Rahman).

In Section IV, “ Militarized Geographies of White Supremacy,” anthropologists examine white supremacy as Western state power. We examine how fascist intimacies are molded into US police cadets (Beliso-De Jesús), the role of white supremacy in militarized Okinawa (Carter), the plight of asylum seekers in US immigration courts (Loperena), the war on terror in Kenya (Al-Bulushi), along with the relationship between the criminal justice system, military power, and police torture between Guantánamo and Chicago (Ralph), and the role of Muslim racialization in global constructions of violence (Li).

Lastly, an anthropology of white supremacy must develop new strategies and ethics for writing, research, and data collection. In our final Section V, “Toward an Anthropology of Liberation,” we draw on the well-developed tools in Black, Arab, and Indigenous feminist anthropology to assist us in undoing white supremacy. We are inspired by the Black feminist struggle for democracy in Brazil (Perry), and the new methods of love and care by Palestinian feminist abolition movements (Ihmoud). This section also looks at how Indigenous anthropologists can undo the white supremacy of settler-colonialism (Ramirez) toward an ethics of liberation. The reader concludes with an interview with Black feminist anthropologist of empire, Faye V. Harrison, who inspires anthropologists to push for transformation both within and outside of the discipline.

Throughout this reader we provide historically based ethnographies and research that demonstrate how an analysis of white supremacy is a necessary endeavor if the discipline is ever to decolonize. This reader, we hope, will serve as an inspiration for students and scholars who wish to engage in an anthropology (and a social science) that is committed to liberation and transformation.

Notes

1. Associated Press, “White Supremacist Images Culminate at Capitol Riot,” YouTube, January 15, 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfzagX_TEpI.

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3. Mallory Simon and Sara Sidner, “Decoding the Extremist Symbols and Groups at the Capitol Hill Insurrection,” CNN, January 11, 2021. www.cnn.com/2021/01/09/us/capitol-hill-insurrection-extremist-flags-soh/index.html.

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5. Anthony DiMaggio, “White Supremacy and January 6: What’s Missing from the Congressional Report,” Counter Punch, December 20, 2022. www.counterpunch.org/2022/12/30/white-supremacy-and-january-6-whats-missing-from-the-congressional-report/.

6. Jason Wilson and Aaron Flanagan, “The Racist ‘Great Replacement’ Conspiracy Theory Explained,” Southern Poverty Law Center, May 17, 2022. www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/05/17/racist-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-explained.

7. Lauren Kent, “European Colonizers Killed So Many Native Americans That It Changed the Global Climate,” CNN, February 2, 2019. www.cnn.com/2019/02/01/world/european-colonization-climate-change-trnd.

8. “AAA membership endorses academic boycott resolution.” *American Anthropological Association*. November 7, 2023. <https://americananthro.org/news/aaa-membership-endorses-academic-boycott-resolution/>.

9. In 2016, the first AAA member vote was held to consider the academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. This call was to challenge the seventy-five-year settler-colonial apartheid system across historic Palestine that included racialized violence and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population. The campaign, spearheaded by AnthroBoycott, first suffered a narrow defeat in 2016. But in 2023, the boycott resolution was passed with an overwhelming majority. AnthroBoycott took on the difficult task of advocating both for the recognition of and dismantling of settler colonialism in historic Palestine. AnthroBoycott organizers do the important anti-imperial work that links the prevailing systems of white supremacy and racial settler capitalism. We see this scholarly work as part of this tradition, which understands that our futures are connected through our collective labor.

10. Aaron Boxerman, “What We Know about the Death Toll in Israel from the Hamas-Led Attacks,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2023. www.nytimes.com/2023/11/12/world/middleeast/israel-death-toll-hamas-attack.html. The 1200 number has since been disputed by the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*: <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2023/oct/31/instagram-posts/haaretz-rebuts-claims-about-its-reporting-on-israel/>.

11. “Gaza’s Missing Children: Over 20,000 Children Estimated to Be Lost, Disappeared, Detained, Buried under the Rubble or in Mass Graves,” *Save the Children International*, June 24, 2024. www.savethechildren.net/news/gazas-missing-children-over-20000-children-estimated-be-lost-disappeared-detained-buried-under.

12. “Israel has arrested 9,170 Palestinians in West Bank Since Oct. 7: PPC,” *Muslim Mirror*, June 13, 2024. <https://muslimmirror.com/eng/israel-has-arrested-9170-palestinians-in-west-bank-since-oct-7-ppc/>.

13. AJLabs. June 26, 2024, Israel-Gaza War in Maps and Charts: Live Tracker. *Al Jazeera*. www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker.

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15. WFP Editorial Team, “Gaza Updates: WFP Responds to Hunger Crisis as Rafah Incursion Cuts Access to Warehouse: World Food Programme,” May 17, 2024, *UN World Food Programme*. www.wfp.org/stories/gaza-updates-wfp-responds-hunger-crisis-rafah-incursion-cuts-access-warehouse.

16. International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, June 28, 2024. <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>.

17. International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)*, June 28, 2024. <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>.

18. See Abraham Gutman, “Supporting Palestinian Rights Is Antisemitic Because Israel Wants It to Be,” NBCNews.com, May 27, 2021. www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/how-jews-can-support-palestinian-rights-condemn-antisemitism-ncna1268680. Indeed, the Jewish activists in Germany, many of whom are themselves Israelis, “make up a disproportionate percentage of those detained for protesting against Tel Aviv’s warpath.” Maximilian Hess, “Criticism of Israel’s War and Occupation Is Not Anti-Semitism,” *Al Jazeera*, March 13, 2024. www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/13/criticism-of-israels-war-and-occupation-is-not-anti-semitism. Also, Jemima Pierre, “Zionism, Anti-Blackness, and the Struggle for Palestine,” *Savage Minds*, November 10, 2015. <https://savageminds.org/2015/11/10/zionism-anti-blackness-and-the-struggle-for-palestine/>.

19. Danica Kirka, Menelaos Hadjicostis, and Fatima Hussein, “A Global Day of Protests Draws Thousands in Washington and Other Cities in Pro-Palestinian Marches,” AP News, January 13, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/protest-gaza-israel-palestinians-london-29d5cd664c81654283344d1874691a4f>. See also Willem Marx, “Campus Protests over the War in Gaza Have Gone International,” NPR, May 3, 2024. www.npr.org/2024/05/03/1248661834/student-protests-gaza-universities-international. Also, Al Jazeera, “Calls to End Gaza ‘Bloodbath’ after Israeli Attack Kills 274 Palestinians,” *Al Jazeera*, June 9, 2024. www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/9/bloodbath-israels-central-gaza-raids-condemned-as-274-palestinians-die.

20. It is important to note the work of American studies scholar and historian Kathleen Belew (2018) and their role in the congressional hearings on “Confronting White Supremacy” and the problematic theme of “Addressing the Transnational Terrorist Threat” that adopts the troubling language of the War on Terror that racializes Muslims while comparing this to white supremacist violence. US Congress, House of Representatives, *Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part III): Addressing the Transnational Terrorist Threat*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., September 20, 2019. www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-116hhrg37975/CHRG-116hhrg37975. Contrary to the insinuations of “terrorism,” Belew’s work connects the violence of white supremacists to the US military and the mobilization of a white power social movement that draws on conservative Christianity and a militant masculinity constructed in the last half century of US imperial wars.

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