

# Who Let the Dogs in? Antiblackness, Social Exclusion, and the Question of Who Is Human

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## Abstract

This article illuminates how the lived experiences of Black men in comparison to experiences of dogs in society highlight antiblackness as the prevailing sentiment in America. This juxtaposition illuminates the psychological project embedded within antiblackness—to dehumanize Black people by elevating dogs alongside other racial groups that have been deemed as human. The article demonstrates how dogs have not only been embraced by Whites, but have been given access into spaces and granted civil liberties for which Blacks continue to struggle. The article looks at the role of dogs in a country that once categorized them as nuisances and marked them with disdain by identifying them along with Blacks, Mexicans, Jews, Irish, Chinese, and Japanese as the “undesirable” elements of society. Today’s acceptance of and advocacy for dogs as a social phenomenon demonstrates the possibility of an ideology shift by Whites, while simultaneously demonstrating their dogged determination to hold to an ideology that cast Black people as less than human.

## Keywords

race, antiblackness, social exclusion, humanism, speciesism

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Today the dog world is in the throes of political and ideological convulsions of a kind not seen since Victorian times, when the dog as we know it was invented. Put simply, the dog is now in the process of being reimaged.

—Homans (2012, p. 1)

## Introduction

Black people<sup>1</sup> in the United States have always experienced some level of integration into White spaces. Their roles as caregivers and servants in the homes of White Americans speak to the historic ability of Whites to allow Black people certain levels of social integration. But the question of how Blacks gain entry into these spaces has less to do with recognizing limits of social integration as much as it has to do with recognizing the limits of humanity, and for some, the very unimaginability of Black people as fully human. While the Irish have become categorized as White, and by extension human, by embracing racism against Blacks (Ignatiev, 1995), others have been categorized as White through behaviors and practices. Jewish people, for instance, have become White by what Karen Brodtkin (2000) attributes to education and ownership opportunities, and Roediger (2006) suggests that immigrants have in various ways been granted inclusion in to whiteness and therefore humanity. Fox and Guglielmo (2012) contend entry into whiteness<sup>2</sup> for certain groups is complicated. For example, South Eastern Europeans faced barriers because they were classified as White on the census, but were still unable to exercise citizenship rights such as voting. Other groups, like Mexicans, teetered along blurred boundaries of whiteness where they could be considered White in one city or region and not in another. Other groups have been viewed as junior partners in whiteness (Wilderson, 2003). This integration of non-Black immigrant groups has occurred while Black people remain excluded from humanity by what Yancey (2003) describes as the alienation thesis.

Even as these racial and ethnic groups struggled for humanity through whiteness, there is evidence that dogs have more easily earned whiteness and are allowed to enjoy benefits as human, demonstrating the possibility of philosophical shifts by White Americans and their dogged determination to exclude Black people from humanity.

While it may seem farfetched to juxtapose experiences of Black Americans and dogs, this juxtaposition illuminates the psychological project embedded within antiblackness and the goal to remind the Black man that he is “the prototype of a poisoned, burnt subject. He is a being whose life is made of ashes”

(Mbembe, 2017, p. 40). This article illuminates the particularities of dogs and their lived experiences in American society alongside the experiences of Black people in an effort to highlight antiblackness as the prevailing sentiment in society. In addition, by examining the inclusion of dogs into society, resistance to Blacks becomes more evident. This is because whiteness reaches across species to include and humanize dogs in the same ways that Jane Goodall humanized chimpanzees in a third world African community as part of the “colonial character of wildlife conservation” (Garland, 2008).

The sections that follow include literature that highlights the making of Whites, the current positioning of dogs, and their inclusion into mainstream culture. The next section illuminates the degree to which dogs are granted access to spaces once forbidden to them—spaces still exclusionary for Blacks. This article draws upon theories of antiblackness and reimagining the human to explain why integration continues to fall short. Furthermore, an examination of the Black male versus the canine presence in public spaces, appropriation of Black suffering, and criminal sentencing practices of Black men is presented to draw out the change in ideology and position of dogs and the resistance to the “others” named on Jim Crow era signage shown in Figure 1. This article then points to current examples of the privileges dogs hold, and the value ascribed to their bodies, their lives and their safety. The article concludes by offering implications as to why actively refusing Blacks their humanity while simultaneously including dogs in society highlights the inhumanity of Whites who do so.

## Grounding Literature

White racial identity has been recognized as property (Harris, 1995; Hobbs, 2014; Lopez, 2006). Its value is linked to the privilege afforded to those who possess it. Just as Shapiro (2004) identified the costs of being Black in America, particularly with regard to maintaining wealth, Harris (1995) points out the benefits of being White. Historically, whiteness has been both a privilege and a property. It affords specific economic benefits and specific value to those who possess it. As such, these identities have been capitalized upon by mixed-race individuals who ascribe to white superiority and the inherent benefits of passing as White (Ehlers, 2012; Hobbs, 2014).

Ehlers (2012) explains the lengths to which performativity of whiteness and value ascribed when Blacks pass as Whites in the case of *Rhineland v. Rhineland*. As the defendant, Alice Rhineland’s claim had been successful in demonstrating whiteness, neither her body nor behaviors betrayed her. Suing to preserve whiteness, as seen in Rhineland’s case, demonstrates ways in which a person is expected to express and conform to the norms of



**Figure 1.** Photos from images depicting the exclusion of Blacks along with dogs. One image (right) is from Texas and the other (left) is from London in 1966.  
 Source. Photos from Google images.

the racial identity to which they are supposed to belong (Ehlers, 2012). This remains consistent with Lopez's (2006) assertion that the law is implicated in constructing what people look like and ascribing meaning based on appearances.

For Blacks, passing as White in America afforded an opportunity to navigate the world more freely and to secure opportunities that would otherwise have been denied. This was held as the key to humanity.

Yancey (2003) outlines the ways in which certain minority groups have eventually been recognized as White and sees it as an expansive practice. Yancey (2003) argues that

When we forget that certain European groups were once treated as minority group members, there is a tendency to accept a static concept of whiteness. It is only when we recognize that the definition of the majority group status is dynamic and evolving that we can conceptualize a future where notions of whiteness will change. Because the dynamic and expansive nature of majority group status, it is reasonable to predict that individuals who are not defined as white today will be defined as white in the future. (p. 28)

This has proven the case for ethnic groups who have in various ways been granted inclusion into whiteness and therefore humanity, essentially by virtue of white bodies which eventually trump their class identities (Roediger, 2006). Because some ethnic groups actively pursue whiteness, Yancey (2003) suggests that Blacks in America will lose allies because those same racial minority groups that once stood in solidarity with Blacks now self-identify as White rather than hold their minority status. Sexton (2011) has argued that it is possible to be antiblack without being a white supremacist, that one can

reject the thesis that it is best to be White as it is possible to accept the postulate that it is worst to be Black. Gordon (2015) argues the point thusly, “[t] here are two principles that emerge in an antiblack society. They are ‘be white!’ and avoid blackness!” (p. 40).

Whiteness has made itself permeable to certain racial groups and not others; and in further excluding Blacks, it has given way to different species. In this same society where Black people struggle for recognition, dogs have become White, are associated with whiteness, and have been allowed to enjoy benefits as human, illustrating the changes made in society for dogs alongside other ethnic minorities like the Irish. The changes to the status of dogs are taken up in the next section.

### *The Role of Dogs in Society*

The role of dogs in American society has taken many forms. Derr (2004) affirms this in recounting the history of dogs in America including their trajectory to their current position. Grimm (2014) asserts that by the turn of the 21st century, the role of dogs in society had begun yet another shift; cats and dogs had begun to achieve legal status as they moved closer to personhood. This change in animal status in America can be viewed as an ideological shift about who and what constitutes the human. It also demonstrates the possibility to redefine those who were once viewed as existing outside of humanity.

### *Integration of Dogs*

Perhaps the most common understanding of dogs in society is as *man's best friend*. The dog as family member begins the dog as human classification. Dogs have surpassed fathers as the support system for children. A PEW poll returned that more children confided in their dogs than they confided in their fathers (Pew Research Center, 2006). The PEW report also noted dog owners, more than other pet owners, consider their pets as members of their families. They are the ultimate companion species (Haraway, 2003).

The philanthropic contribution of dogs to society can be seen in their use in the medical and caring professions. But the controversy for animal rights activist comes when dogs or other animals are used in animal testing, sought for their fur or treated inhumanely as they are bred for food (Elder, Wolch, & Emel, 1998). This article does not offer support for the inhumane treatment of dogs, rather it highlights the moral and humane treatment dogs receive while Black people in the United States struggle for recognition.

In addition to being heralded as family members, dogs also serve to distinguish between certain classes of people (Tissot, 2011, p. 2723). While they

are recognized as companion species, they have come to be weaponized as agents and instruments of social control. Studies show that dogs serve as gentrifying agents and are used to secure public spaces to be used for dog parks and dog runs—spaces where mostly White, middle-class people congregate. When Black and Latino dog owners are in these spaces, they are labeled as somehow deficient; they are critiqued for how they engage with their animals and are subsequently surveilled and disciplined by their White neighbors (Mayorga-Gallo, 2018). Because pets are transformed into social capital, they are viewed within specific social norms. The breed of dog contributes to the classification of whiteness for both the dog and its owner. In fact, Mayorga-Gallo (2018) noted that in the making of space the breed and size of the dogs also contribute to how the space is defined. This means for Blacks and other people of color who have dogs of a certain acceptable breed, as opposed to the Pit Bulls or Rottweilers associated with the inner-city, they are offered entry into particular spaces; it can be said that their animals are often greeted before they are. In addition, Mayorga-Gallo (2018) found that dogs are key in defining and constructing spaces as safe. However, what creates safe spaces for Whites begins un-safe spaces for people of color.

In American society, when dogs are used as agents in constructing societal norms, they are humanized, while also setting a standard for what moral treatment looks like. According to Elder et al. (1998), animal practices, specifically how people from different racial and ethnic groups engage with animals, are part of the construction of the human-animal divide. In her study of White middle-class dog owners in CreekrIDGE Park, Mayorga-Gallo (2018) outlines the ways dogs served as tools for Whites to maintain space and create racialized boundaries of safety for themselves. The dogs also served as socializing agents, and tools used to criminalize Black and Latino residents. White residents policed dog owners of color and couched their racism in their concerns about the dogs, further using dogs as reasons for restricting the interactions Black and Latinos had in neighborhood spaces. Essentially, Whites put forth messages that if Black and Latino dog owners did not respect animals in particular ways, then those owners could not participate in the neighborhood. Mayorga-Gallo states findings that because race is central to social life in the United States, dogs served to facilitating social interactions, reify racial logics and maintain a system of White supremacy.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To make sense of the “whitening” of dogs, that is, how dogs have progressed to a state of personhood, this article uses antiblackness (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Fanon, 1967; Gordon, 1995; Hart, 2018; Parker, 2017;

Sexton; Wilderson, 2017; Wun, 2016), as well as Sylvia Wynter's (1984) reimagining of the human. Antiracism as a framework addresses the position of Blacks outside of humanity. It takes up global project of dispelling Blacks through systemic efforts of annihilation. Antiracism, through scholarship, is defined as the hegemonic and global practice of denying humanity to people of African descent. It is based upon Blacks as nonbeings, abjections, and negations of humanity (Fanon, 1967; Hartman, 2017; Sexton, 2011; Wilderson, 2003). Gordon (2015) clarifies that "[w]hat [B]lackness wants is not to be problematic beings; they want to escape from that zone. They want to be human in the face of a structure that denies their humanity" (p. 22).

Central to antiracism, which emerged from Afro-pessimism, is the impact of slavery on the current positionality of Blacks. As Dubois (2017) posits, it was through slavery and colonialism where blackness came to denote other than human. In fact, a Black person was to be considered as a distinct other whose humanity was distinct and perpetually in question. Wilderson (2003) argues that "the black subject position in America is an antagonism, a demand that cannot be satisfied through a transfer of ownership/organization of existing rubrics . . ." (p. 231). This is to say that though the 13th Amendment granted freedom and ownership to Blacks through abolition of slavery, but not even the 14th Amendment or civil rights movement has afforded the right of citizenship and inclusion. This is because of the double-bind of freedom in America; it is the illusion of equality. Hartman (2017) argues this point of emancipation,

Just as the peculiar and ambivalent articulation of chattel status of the enslaved black and the assertion of his rights under the law, however limited, had created a notion of black personhood or subjectivity in which all the burdens and few of the entitlements of personhood came to characterize this humanity, . . . I have opted to characterize the nascent individualism of emancipation as "burdened individuality" in order to underline the double bind of freedom: being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject. (pp. 35-36)

The use of dogs as policing agents is demonstrative of the ways in which dogs access a specific societal position. Derr (2004) traces the role of dogs as official policing agents to Germany in 1886 and recalls that dogs were deployed to intimidate and to track fugitive slaves in the 1800s in America. Later in the South, Black convicts found themselves victimized by dogs in the hands of Whites as they were hunted and tracked forcing them to be returned to peonage and brutality associated with convict leasing. Even more, the interspecies violence depicted in 1960s images of police dogs attacking

Black protestors was an illustration of the state sanctioned conditioning of dogs to be antiblack and to vehemently attack Blacks at every turn in an effort to contain and repress civil rights efforts (Parry, 2019). Clark (1963) suggests that the use of dogs brings to the fore failures in American society, and contends that dogs in the hands of human beings attacking other human beings is an indication of moral decay.

Although the history of dogs policing Blacks can be traced to the 1800s, Blacks were not allowed to serve as police for their own communities until recently. Forman (2017)<sup>3</sup> uses the case of the Washington, D.C., police force to elucidate the political and ideological conflicts that arose as Black officers sought the opportunity to police their own community. Although the first Black officers were voted in by the city council in 1947, it would be decades before Black officers in D.C. would be allowed to police their communities without the formal and informal restriction enforced by White officers.

It is the violence experienced by Blacks at the hands of police officers and the paws and teeth of dogs that corroborates the state's classification of the Black body as subhuman further establishing the White-human/Black-nonhuman binary. In fact, in Los Angeles, police violence and murder involving Blacks was coded as NHI, that is, no humans involved (Wynters, 1994). Such coding is indicative of the unimaginability of Black humanity and justification of state-sanctioned violence. In addition, police dogs that were turned upon Black people participating in marches and protests during the civil rights movement creates an irony as that same movement would be co-opted to claim personhood and humanity rights for dogs.

### Co-Opting Civil Rights

Legal scholar Jonathan Lovvorn (2006), who specializes in animal law, analyzed the struggle for human rights by Black Americans in order to situate the struggle for granting animals "personhood." He begins with *Plessy v. Ferguson* and its denial of rights of recognition to Black Americans. He details the ways in which animals rights strategists fall under lure creating a historical case like *Brown v. Board* on behalf of animals. Lovvorn ultimately cautions against the use because of the still nonhumane treatment of Blacks and their everlasting struggle to achieve personhood. He suggests that instead of evoking the civil rights movement, that in some instances led to rights that were symbolic rather than actualized, dog advocates might be better served by drawing upon the legal gains that came from the environmental movement over the last 30 years.

Dayan (2011) includes dogs alongside Black slaves in explaining how legal rituals and law itself are culprits in the making and unmaking of persons. She aims to complicate the ways in which dogs, at certain historical moments, were legally expected to pay for their crimes of harming humans. She includes them within the conversation of “negative personhood” as she implicates the ways in which law maintains our current philosophies of personhood.

Kanji (2017) explores a similar project of colonial animality in relation to whiteness in the Euro-Canadian Settler conflict. He argues that part of the colonial project is to impose Euro ethics upon the Native and demonize the Native’s practices around animals. In addition, Kanji (2017) argued that defining the indigenous population as subhuman excluded them from personhood and property rights. They were barred from exerting ownership over both land and animals. In such cases, the European colonizer, who declared *terra nullius* (nobody’s land) in the usurpation of Native people’s land, also took ownership of the Native’s animals making them White people’s property and subject to the benefits thereof.

Equating the struggle of animals with that of Blacks is akin to placing dogs on the sign with human beings (Blacks, Mexican, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, and Irish). It is to place dogs at the level of the human using the struggle for civil rights. Many Whites in society, however, now elevates the dog beyond Blacks; that is taken up in the next section.

*(Black) man versus dog—The space race.* Lazarus (2017), a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, wrote candidly about the presence of dogs in Starbucks. In his article, he confesses that he has seen dogs and has himself brought dogs with him into Starbucks and admits never having received any reprimand or harassment. However, Starbucks has a defined corporate policy regarding dogs in stores. In response to an inquiry about dogs the following was offered by Starbucks:

When it comes to the dogs, only service animals are allowed to come to our stores. State/local laws and definitions of service animals may be different. Starbucks is required to comply with the law having the broadest definition of service animal. (Starbucks information response, July 10, 2018)

The photo taken at a Starbucks in Northern California substantiates Lazarus’ claims about the unfettered presence of dogs in Starbucks (see Figure 2). These two dogs remained in Starbucks for nearly 2 minutes unattended as their owner was outside of the establishment. The dogs, who were seated in chairs reserved for human patrons were never approached. Lazarus



**Figure 2.** Dogs in Starbucks in Benicia California in 2018.

Photo: Lynette Parker.

This picture was taken 2 months after Black men were arrested and removed from a Starbucks in Philadelphia for not making a purchase.

concluded in his article that Starbucks is “cool” about the occurrence of dogs in the space, and while they are able to inquire as to whether the dog is a service dog, they are not allowed to require documentation. This indicates that the presence of dogs in Starbucks literally goes unquestioned.

On Wednesday, April 12, 2018, Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson were arrested for sitting in a Starbucks in Philadelphia. They did not make a purchase within the first 2 minutes of their stay and apparently refused to leave when asked. The two Black men were led out in handcuffs setting off a national fervor on social media. Yet the policies and guidelines about what to do in instances where nonpaying customers linger in Starbucks is unclear, as is the policy about how long a purchase from Starbucks allows one to occupy the space (Jargon, 2018). According to Starbucks,

Concerning the previous policy [of unpaying patrons], this was something we were working on and we did not have anything written about this. However, now, we are committed to creating a culture of warmth and belonging where everyone is welcome. This policy is intended to help maintain the third place environment in alignment with our mission “to inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.” (Starbucks information response, July 10, 2018).

When considering Lazarus’ article and the example of the dogs in the Northern California Starbucks, there is evidence of privilege and acceptance

afforded dogs. As they are allowed in many instances to remain “unpaying customers” in a Starbucks for nearly 2 minutes, while Nelson and Robinson of Philadelphia were afforded no similar privilege. It is antiblack racism that causes the presence of Nelson’s and Robinson’s bodies to disrupt space in a way that dogs’ bodies do not. Wilderson asserts that because blackness is a positionality of “absolute dereliction, abandonment, in the face of civil society, [it] therefore cannot establish itself, or be established, through hegemonic interventions. Blackness cannot become one of civil society’s many junior partners” (p. 67). While dogs can linger, the Black males must be expelled.

*(Black) man versus dog—Value of the dead body.* In recent incidents, police and those acting as police have been exonerated of any criminal charges for killing Black men and women. This is indicative of how Blacks have been cast in America. Martinot and Sexton (2017) put forth that *discourse* surrounding the killings are part of normalizing White supremacist rhetoric. They contend that such discourse is shaped by the social order about safety that is jeopardized without the instantiations of police violence to manage society. Yet this movement toward animal personhood attempts to establish the rationality for the safety and protection of animals. White supremacy and antiblack racism informs necropolitics and determines why murders of Black men are justified and result in no punishment while killings of dogs are viewed as unjustifiable and result in excessive punishment.

In 2013, an 18-year-old Black male, Ivins Rosier, was sentenced to 23 years for killing an ex-police dog during the home invasion of a Florida Highway patrolman (Downs, 2015). According to Detective DiMola, who took a statement from Rosier, “if you shot that dog and he dies, that’s murder of a law enforcement officer.” Later, headlines for Kelontre Barefield, age 23, read, “Man who shot police dog Jethro gets 45 years in prison.” The murder of the dogs resulted in a loss for society. However, in this same society if an unarmed Black teenager is shot and killed, or if an asthmatic Black male is choked to death for selling loose cigarettes, this is not considered murder and as such reinforces the devaluation of Black male bodies. Death is the fact of blackness as justice is the fact of whiteness. Classifying dogs as White thereby rationalizes the punishments that were meted out to Barefield and Rosier in the same era where no criminal punishment was meted out for police officers who murdered Eric Garner and Freddie Gray.

Alexander (2010) illuminates the ways in which justice and punishment in the form of sentencing has been demonstrated to be racially biased. She reports a profiling study in Oakland, California, in which Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to be stopped by police and 3 times as likely to be searched. In addition, Baldus, Pulaski, and Woodworth (1983) found that even after

controlling for 39 variables, defendants charged with killing White victims were 4.3 times more likely to receive the death penalty than those defendants charged with killing Black people. The severity of sentencing for taking the life of a White person versus taking the life of a Black person is indicative of the property valued placed on whiteness (Harris, 1995). It is “whiteness,” according to Hartman (2017), “a valuable and exclusive property essential to integrity of the citizen subject” (p. 39). Elder et al. (1998) argue the “[t]he treatment of animals, when it differs from that deemed acceptable by the dominant culture, is often utilized to devalue immigrant and minority populations” (p. 185).

*Appropriating Black suffering.* The #BlackLivesMatter movement, motivated by the exoneration of George Zimmerman who murdered Trayvon Martin, addresses killings of Black people by police as well as injustices and oppression of other marginalized groups. However, in the article entitled, “What Dog Shootings Reveal About American Policing” Friedersdorf (2017) focuses attention on police who kill dogs in an effort to shed light on a subject that he claims is not given enough attention. Friedersdorf (2017) reports in *The Atlantic* of police shootings of innocent, tail-wagging dogs, gives a nod to the national fervor over police killing Black people, but goes on to claim that police shootings of dogs also warrant national attention.

Drawing upon the appeal that while dogs pose a threat, their murders are unwarranted, society advocates for the lives of dogs and justices in the case of their murders (Friedersdorf, 2017). The response is consistent with outcry that prompted the documentary *Of Dog and Men* supported by the Animal Legal Defense Fund (2018). On the website, *Dogs Shot by Cops: Companion Animals and Law Enforcement* proffer that

When a police officer kills someone’s companion animal, it deeply affects the animal’s human family, as well as the officer, the neighborhood and the community. This sad situation is all too common and the Animal Legal Defense Fund fields many calls asking for advice. Unfortunately, there is rarely a clear path to justice. The Animal Legal Defense Fund is a proud sponsor of that award winning documentary *Of Dogs & Men*-which brings to light the need for humane dog training for police officers, to avoid the unnecessary death of dogs. (The Animal Legal Defense Fund, *Dogs Shot by Cop*, 2018).

This advocacy effort received little resistance, while a 2016 PEW poll reports that only 28% of White Americans support the #BlackLivesMatter movement sparked by the nonguilty verdict for George Zimmerman who shot and killed Trayvon Martin. It is perhaps more difficult for some to imagine

the pain of losing Black men as companions than it is to imagine losing dogs as companions. To date, the killings of unarmed Black men by police officers has not led to more humane treatment with regard to policing the Black community. However, in March of 2018, Utah Legislature passed Senate Bill 0057—Police Service Animal Amendment that makes it a “second degree felony to intentionally or knowingly cause death to a police service canine; and makes it a third degree felony to intentionally or knowingly injure a police service canine.”

Sexton (2007) offers another example of how Black suffering is obscured in times of crises in Black communities. Hurricane Katrina’s devastating impact on the Black community in New Orleans prompted a response by the National Guard (Shane & Shanker, 2005). During the aftermath, the pain and victimization of Blacks were co-opted by other racial and ethnic groups as well as by humanitarians standing in the gap for dogs. Grimm (2014) presents narratives about dogs and their struggle for recognition in the midst of the Katrina disaster. Grimm effectively centers animals’ suffering by recounting stories of animals lost in the flood waters. While hundreds of Blacks remained displaced, he offered stories about the resources that were allocated to locating lost dogs. Grimm ends his chapter about animals in Katrina by thanking the disastrous hurricane for having served as the impetus for the law, which moves animals closer to legal personhood.

Sexton (2007) points to two specific media reports which illuminate ways of obscuring Black suffering. “The Forgotten Victims” and “Katrina’s Other Victims,” in which images of a deceased dog partially covered by a sheet, led to public outcry and the first animal rescue plan H.R. 3858 introduced by Rep. Tom Lantos (Nolen, 2005). Some 10 years later a Black community in Ferguson would see the feet of Michael Brown, whose bullet-ridden, deceased body was also partially covered by a sheet. Yet Black Americans still cannot point to any specific House or Senate bill proposed to address police violence.

*Contextualizing canine inclusion/Black exclusion.* Scholars have identified ways in which dogs have been weaponized. For example, Elder et al. (1998) argue,

animals can be used to racialize, dehumanize, and maintain power relations in three key ways: 1) By using animals as absent referents or models for human behavior; 2) By imputing similarities in behavior or bodily features and/or associations with the animal world; and 3) By viewing people (and cultures) through the lens of specific human practices on animal bodies. (p. 194)

Thus, dismissing the use of animals in the project of White supremacy and antiblack racism is a practice in avoidance.

Analyzing the access currently available to dogs, but still restricted to Black people requires contextualizing the dehumanization of Blacks and returning to slavery's foundations. African Americans as subpersons is written into the foundation of our nation as Black people were brought to the nation under the bondage of slavery and considered as chattel. Although slavery is not mentioned in the actual Constitution of 1787, it became clearly defined in the Supreme Court through jurisprudence (Finkelman, 2012). In addition, the Three Fifths Compromise, which along with the Fugitive Slave Act was considered part of the "trinity of evil" (Lawson, 1997), would justify defining Black people as fractions of human for the purpose of taxation. Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 reads,

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among several of the States which may be included in the Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free Persons, including bound to service for a terms of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. (Three Fifths Compromise)

The period of slavery in which the Compromise was set shaped the master/slave (Black/human) relationship (Wilderson, 2017). It is the Black/human relation that is irreconcilable within the current structure. This antagonistic relationship defines Black people's struggle for civil rights as a tumultuous fight toward personhood.

Wynter (2003) contends that in America, the assimilation of Blacks into the category of "the other" represented the missing link between rational humans and irrational animals. This is in contrast to Bell's (2011) assertion that a clean divide between the human and animal enabled a stable concept of animal and man. The White man's commitment to the exclusion of non-Whites keeps people of color from being fully recognized in either category of animal or man. Just as in America where Black people were cast as partially person and partially animal, in Canada, White Europeans engaged in a similar project of dehumanizing Aboriginal natives. Kanji uncovered the interpellation of subject within the Eurocentric-anthropocentric colonial project as being possible only because Europeans constitute the indigenous people of Canada as lacking full humanity. Wynter (1994) argues that ways in which the human is constituted within a binary is contingent upon an "other," or a negation, in order that a true human can be fully realized. In some cases, the opposition is classified as "chaos" (p. 37). This current movement toward animal personhood attempts to establish the

rationality of animals thereby placing Blacks perpetually outside of the limits of the human.

The inclusion of dogs into mainstream society and their acceptance into spaces where they were once forbidden, then, demonstrates the capacity of White racists to change and even evolve. Whites are fully aware of who and what constitutes the human, and what it means to be treated humanely. In concluding, I address two questions: (a) Why do Blacks remain excluded from society and humanity? and (b) Who is human?

## Conclusion

### *Why Do Blacks Remain Excluded From Society and Humanity?*

Scholars have argued that the resistance to Black humanity does not arise out of ignorance, but is active in its denial of Black people. The exclusion of Blacks in America by Whites has been indicative of the deep-embedded state-sanctioned violence, and institutionalized ideology that refuses to recognize Blacks as humans. It is a global project of antiblackness which renders the future acceptance into whiteness that Yancey describes as part of the alienation Black Americans experience. However, Yancey's claim that this alienation results from Black people's historic inability to incorporate into society downplays White resistance to and active denial of Blacks as members of dominant society.

Elder et al. (1998) argue that animal bodies are sites for political struggle and they help maintain White supremacy. As society is reimagining dogs as more human, it is further excluding Blacks from humanity. The practice of dehumanizing Black people by associating them with animals in such a project occurs while simultaneously creating images and headlines that paint Blacks as worse than animals. Whites taking up the global project to animalize Blacks do so in contrast to treating animals with respect and dignity.

Whites, who supposedly constitute *the human*, have used dogs as ways to classify minorities and immigrants as criminal (Elder et al., 1998). They have policed Black and Latino dog owners (Mayorga-Gallo, 2018), and have outright called for humanity and recognition for dogs (Abney, 2018). In so doing, they stray away from civilized behavior.

The abuse of Black Americans and the denial of humanity has unintended consequences. Just as treating animals inhumanely demonstrates to Whites that perpetrators are less human, so too the inhumane treatment of Blacks calls into question the humanity of White racist. As the project of creating the civil out of the savage in part constitutes the human, there are then certain expectations of being human. Elder et al. (1998) argue that “[h]umans define

the boundary between themselves and other animals, in part on the basis of their treatment of animals. Specific human-animal interactions that are legitimized and rationalized over time, become *acceptable as civilized behavior*" (p. 196, italics added for emphasis). The decline of society can be seen in the fact that this "civilized" behavior normalizes the dehumanization of Black people.

### *The Question of Who Is "Human"*

Kanji (2017) has argued that the production of the human is the major project of European colonialism. That is to say that in defining themselves as human, Whites dictate the relationships between those classified as subhuman and nonhuman.

The treatment of Blacks by White Americans who privilege dogs illuminates who is indeed human. Although the effort to elevate dogs over Black people grants "humanity" to dogs, it acts as psychological violence that purposely degrades Blacks. The concerted actions point to a subhumanity of Whites. Thus, in questioning who is human, it becomes important to theorize how humans are expected to think, feel, and react with regard to other living creatures.

Weisberg (2011) argues,

human beings are caught in a similar tug-of-war between loving and hateful impulses toward other animals . . . When we become conscious of our sadistic behavior toward other animals who we might otherwise feel an affinity for, profound guilt sets in. This guilt adds another dimension to our ambivalence. We kill and maim helpless animals, we feel bad about it, at least on an unconscious level. Indeed, our repressed animality lives on in this guilt, reverberating the depths of our psyche. (p. 182)

A "human" reaction, then, is to feel guilt when we maim or kill animals. Whites, then, as the quintessential human should care when a helpless animal is maimed or killed. They should feel guilty about it. In a society that considers Black as subperson/animals and brutes—would a Black person as an animal elicit empathy? So, as Whites have let the dog in, casting them closer to human, their refusal clarifies their own lack of humanity because they cannot consent to either humanity or the animality of Blacks.

If Black Americans were considered animals in the ways that *whitened* animals are, they would even enjoy the humanity afforded dogs. Blacks in America would be able to sit in Starbucks; they would be able to receive justice when murdered; they would receive government assistance in the time

of trauma. By all accounts, if the Black man were animal, he would be advocated for in the same way activists advocate for animals.

Unfortunately, Black people are considered *neither* human nor animal in a way that is acceptable to Whites. In this antiblack society, Fanon (1967) has argued that the Black man is in a zone of nonbeing. This is even more so when comparatively analyzing the Black man's position to the position of the dog. This revelation, however, not only solidifies for us the question of who is human, it begins the undoing and hypocrisy of Whites as humans.

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### Notes

1. Blacks refers to people of the African Diaspora living in the United States of America. Whites is used to refer to racial category of those of European descent.
2. In this article, whiteness and blackness refer to characteristics. As such, whiteness embodies benefits and privileges attributed to White bodies and personhood of Whites.
3. Forman (2017) establishes policing as part of what Althusser (1971) calls the *Repressive State Apparatus*. Washington, D.C., is eventually policed by a predominately Black police force that continues the project of oppressing and abusing Black people in much the same way White police officers did.

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