

Threading Hope: Afro-Pessimism and Whiteness

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Afro-Pessimism is a political and intellectual revolution, forcing scholars to grapple with the continual entrenchments of antiblackness and the supposed impossibility of a response. These social relations, according to Afro-Pessimism, create the conditions where there is the Human and the Slave. However, in the very focus on what Hartman calls the “afterlife of slavery” (2007), scholars and proponents on social media of Afro-Pessimism have not adequately addressed whiteness and its intersection with their theorizing. Afro-Pessimism is pessimistic because it does not account for whiteness as whiteness.

This paper explores an underbelly of whiteness within Afro-pessimism with particular attention to the constitutive, world-building assumptions employed. Using Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s work (1994), I analyze the ideas of Frank Wilderson’s political ontology and Jared Sexton’s black social death. Whiteness creates the enunciative ontological conditions that, when it remains invisible, contribute to the pessimistic takeaway of this theory. I examine how Afro-pessimism functions as a concept (in a Deleuze and Guattari sense) to suggest that whiteness is a vital thread in the underpinning their theorizing. Instead of claiming Human as a totalizing category opposed to Slave, I argue that we should see whiteness in its ontological place. Ultimately, my aim to is to make whiteness visible to make more potentialities available. By explicating whiteness within Afro-pessimism, the core of the revolutionary theory remains but the pessimistic portion may not.