RACE MATTERS, ANIMAL MATTERS

Fugitive Humanism in African America,
1840–1930

LINDGREN JOHNSON

Race Matters, Animal Matters

Race Matters, Animal Matters challenges one of the grand narratives of African American studies: that African Americans rejected racist associations of blackness and animality through a disassociation from animality. Analyzing canonical texts written by Frederick Douglass, Charles Chesnutt, Ida B. Wells, and James Weldon Johnson alongside slaughterhouse lithographs, hunting photography, and sheep “husbandry” manuals, Lindgren Johnson argues instead for a critical African American tradition that at pivotal moments reconsiders and recuperates discourses of animality weaponized against both African Americans and animals. Johnson articulates a theory of “fugitive humanism” in which these texts flee both white and human exceptionalism, even as they move within and seek out a (revised) humanist space. The focus, for example, is not on how African Americans shake off animal associations in demanding recognition of their humanity, but on how they hold fast to animality and animals in making such a move, revising “the human” itself as they go and undermining the binaries that helped to produce racial and animal injustices.

Fugitive humanism reveals how an interspecies ethics develops in these African American responses to violent dehumanization. Illuminating those moments in which the African American canon exceeds human exceptionalism, *Race Matters, Animal Matters* ultimately shows how these black engagements with animals and animality are not subsequent to efforts for racial justice—a mere extension of the abolitionist or anti-lynching movements—but, to the contrary, are integral to those efforts. This black-authored temporality challenges widely accepted humanist approaches to the relationship between racial and animal justice as it anticipates and even critiques the valuable insights that animal studies and posthumanism have to offer in our current moment.

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Perspectives on the Non-Human in Literature and Culture

In recent years, many disciplines within the humanities have become increasingly concerned with non-human actors and entities. The environment, animals, machines, objects, weather, and other non-human beings and things have taken center stage to challenge assumptions about what we have traditionally called “the human.” Informed by theoretical approaches like posthumanism, the new materialisms, (including Actor Network Theory, Object-Oriented Ontology, and similar approaches) ecocriticism, and critical animal studies, such scholarship has until now had no separate and identifiable collective home at an academic press. This series will provide that home, publishing work that shares a concern with the non-human in literary and cultural studies. The series invites single-authored books and essay collections that focus primarily on literary texts, but from an interdisciplinary, theoretically-informed perspective; it will include work that crosses geographical and period boundaries. Titles are characterized by dynamic interventions into established subjects and innovative studies on emerging topics.

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Race Matters, Animal Matters
Fugitive Humanism in African America, 1840–1930
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Lindgren Johnson

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Introduction

Fugitive Humanism in African America

In the summer of 2005 People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) launched a new campaign, facilitated by a traveling poster display, entitled “Are Animals the New Slaves?” Including side-by-side images of slaughtered cows and hanging lynched men, crowded battery hens and Africans enduring the Middle Passage, and fettered elephant and human ankles, the campaign elicited a storm of controversy.¹ John White, a spokesperson for the NAACP, condemned PETA for “getting publicity any way they can,” asking in disbelief, “They’re comparing chickens to black people?” (S. Smith). The president of the state and local chapters of the NAACP in Connecticut, Scot X. Esdaile, led a protest of the exhibit when it came to New Haven, shouting in the streets, “Once again, black people are being pimped. You used us. You have used us enough. . . . Take it down immediately” (Garriga). Alongside Esdaile in New Haven, another protester joined in, “I am a black man! I can’t compare the suffering of these black human beings to the suffering of this cow” (Garriga). Describing the exhibition as “disgusting,” Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project with the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, summarized these angry responses: “Black people in America have had quite enough of being compared to animals without PETA joining in” (S. Smith).

The protesters’ reaction to the PETA campaign (many of the comparisons of which were recycled into the more recent exhibit, “Glass Walls,” launched in 2011) rehearses, in the present, a struggle going back to slavery to articulate African American humanity in the face of racist pressures that sought to reduce blackness to a form of “animality,” mere carnality, a brute body. The protesters’ insistence on separation from the animals represented—specifically, their insistence on contrast rather than comparison in regard to black and animal suffering—has largely been interpreted as the means by which they attempt to secure black humanity from the ravages of dehumanization—from the ways that white racism has historically “animalized” black humans.

Tim Wise, an activist, writer, and college circuit speaker on racism and white privilege, argues in his own response to the PETA campaign that black anger over such comparisons is a response to systemic racism

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and, moreover, the white privilege that buoys animal activism, all the while neglecting to see the suffering that African Americans continue to experience:

That PETA can't understand what it means for a black person to be compared to an animal, given a history of having been thought of in exactly those terms, isn't the least bit shocking. After all, the movement is perhaps the whitest of all progressive or radical movements on the planet, for reasons owing to the privilege one must possess in order to focus on animal rights as opposed to, say, surviving oneself from institutional oppression.

Whites, Wise argues, not sharing a history of such violent dehumanization, blindly promote animal justice at the expense of racial justice—by “pimping” black people, as one of the protesters so vehemently insisted. Perhaps, Wise continues, if PETA activists were as concerned with racial justice as animal justice “they would find more sympathy from those who, for reasons that are understandable given their own lives, view animal rights activism as the equivalent of fiddling while Rome burns, rather than as a struggle for greater compassion for all.” Calling into question how radically progressive and inclusive the animal rights (or “animal whites,” as Wise sarcastically puns) movement truly is, Wise stresses the need to consider how the promotion of the ethical treatment of animals by some humans might elide and even perpetuate discrimination against other humans.

Certainly anticipating such criticism from within and without the black community, PETA's own press release introduced and attempted to authorize its comparison of past abuses of blacks with current abuses of animals through a self-conscious invocation of the black-led civil rights movement:

Inspired by the words of civil rights leader Dick Gregory, who said, “Animals and humans suffer and die alike: the same pain, the same spilling of blood, the same stench of death, the same arrogant, cruel, and brutal taking of life,” PETA will unveil a thought-provoking “Animal Liberation” display. . . . The massive walk-through exhibit juxtaposes images of once accepted acts of cruelty to humans with images of present-day cruelty to animals.

Gregory seems to proclaim his ability to do precisely what NAACP street protesters insisted they could or would not: to compare human and animal suffering and to sympathize—or even empathize—with animal suffering. As rhetorically important to PETA's press release as Gregory's own proclamation of sympathy (which I will come back to in just a moment), however, is the authorizing frame of black activism within which PETA packages it. Introducing Gregory as a “civil rights leader” and thus

invoking the civil rights movement of the 1960s in particular, PETA grounds its campaign in the moral weight and success of this black activism of the (fairly recent) past. More specifically, PETA suggests a chronology of activism in which the fight for human rights is directly linked to and can—and, in fact, should—serve as the *precursor* to the fight for animal rights: Gregory was a civil rights activist, after all, and now he is an animal rights activist. While the poster display employs historical representations of blacks in direct comparison to contemporary animals in their extreme suffering as animalized subjects, then, the press release invests twenty-first-century blacks, especially those involved in the civil rights movement, with the highest authority to advocate for today's animals. The efforts that had been applied successfully to securing rights for blacks and other marginalized human populations, we can easily surmise from PETA's statement, must now simply be *extended* to the fight for animal rights.

The protesters, however, do not see racial injustice as something left in the past, but as a legacy of slavery (as human slavery itself is, of course, ongoing) and very much a matter of the present. From this position, the campaign moves forward with a dangerous and false sense of black security, assuming that black human rights have already *been* secured. As Theodore Walker cautions in his "African-American Resources for a More Inclusive Liberation Theory" in regard to animal rights activism in general:

too often what passes for a wider concern inclusive of the environment is in fact a white racially gerrymandered concern which reaches out to include plants and animals while continuing to exclude black and colored peoples. These difficulties have yet to be overcome, and they must be overcome if white environmentalists and animal rights activists expect to receive the support of black and colored peoples.
(279)

For critics such as Walker and Wise, the racial equality and inclusiveness that they believe many white animal rights activists want to assume—a society in which all humans currently receive the same privileges under liberal humanism in their inclusion within "the human"—is an evasive fantasy. Black humanity, despite the real successes of the civil rights movement that PETA invokes, has *not* been fully recognized, and blacks' position within the human has not been stabilized enough to warrant a campaign like PETA's. Moreover, to compare African Americans to animals is to assume that such a comparison has been emptied of its racism.

For these critics, this rhetoric of extensionism is promoted in bad faith and is only a shadow of the true extensionism they call for; it whitewashes the *continuing* black struggle against racism while ostensibly and disingenuously paying homage to that struggle, which is conveniently located

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in the past. Wise and Walker argue that such a model of activism—the one arguably practiced by PETA in this campaign and, they both claim, by other animal rights organizations—exists at the expense of blacks. With their human rights hanging in the balance, black people and their ongoing quest for these rights are pushed aside in the pursuit of animal rights.

Both Walker and Wise ask crucial questions of (white) animal activists and rightly demand that animal activism pay attention to issues of injustice that concern *all* animals, nonhuman and human alike. Neither, however, completely discounts the animal rights movement (despite his excoriations, Wise describes it, after all, as a “struggle for greater compassion for all”). Their critiques revolve not around animal rights’ explicit inclusion of nonhuman animals, but its implicit exclusion of non-white humans—what they see as its blindness, in its pursuit of animal rights, to the ways blacks continue to be denied full human standing and human rights. They question what they see as a white foundation of exclusions that enables and propels what is actually, then, a dangerous *imitation* of extensionism and insist that as important as the animal destination of the extensionist gesture is, the human base of that maneuver is more important. True extensionism, after all, is defined first and foremost by the specifically and pluralistically human origins of its reach; it cannot proceed without such a foundation. Animal activism must advance as an actual extension out of a human community that includes all, rather than elides some, humans. It must be true to the humanist ideology out of which it, by definition, proceeds: humans and their rights come first, animals second.

It almost goes without saying—according to the logic of extensionism that Walker and Wise promote—that while whites may have the requisite privilege to focus on animal rights, blacks, whose human status is rendered tenuous through the persistence of racism, do not. The purported rarity (cited by both) of black animal rights activists is symptomatic of the ongoing black fight to secure human rights, a fight which necessarily trumps the animal rights fight. This truly is a zero-sum game for African Americans: it’s either the animal or you.

But must this be—and has it always been—an either/or proposition? Both Wise’s and Walker’s visions of what might constitute a “more inclusive liberation theory” depend on the *purification* of what is currently passing as extensionism, an ideology that underwrites humanism in its assertion of human exceptionalism. In doing so, both also infer more broadly an unconditional black faith in humanism itself. Such an adherence to (this corrected) extensionism as the model for justice, moreover, guarantees a generalized historical narrative of black detachment from animal politics, past and present. In its absolute separation of humans and animals, embedded in the chronology of rights it promotes (humans first, animals second), extensionism simply does not make room for the

question of the animal within the black fight for racial justice. But has racial justice always been sought by way of human exceptionalism in African America? What *are* the “African American resources” that could lead to a “more inclusive liberation theory,” one that challenges extensionism’s economy of absolute human/animal difference at the same time that it adamantly pursues racial justice?

The beginning of an answer might be found in the intimacies of shared vulnerabilities (or animalities), both biological and socially constructed, to which Gregory draws our attention. Unlike Wise and Walker, who both assume a white animal activist base dependent on privilege and extensionism, Gregory describes an activist base grounded, first, in biological animality—the shared bodily and mortal vulnerability of all biological animals, human and nonhuman alike. In his brief statement he describes this lived animality of all of us as ultimately the “same” (“the same pain, the same blood, the same stench of death”). He subsequently describes the killing of nonhuman and human animals as also identical (“the same arrogant, cruel, and brutal taking of life”): at its root, this violence (or “taking”) is also the “same.”

We see, then, how biological animality is often exploited (or made available to exploitation) and, out of this violence, a second, social category of animality, which contains lives deemed of lesser value, is constructed. Such systemic and violent “animalization,” as the images from PETA’s campaign demonstrate, has long been used to control and exploit both human and nonhuman populations. Crucially, however, Gregory’s proclamation of the nature of this violence as the “same” actually *rejects* the comparative model of PETA’s campaign. In other words, the comparisons PETA makes point to the similarities and even intersections of racism and speciesism, but its focus on similarities and not *intimacies* actually overlooks the *root* of oppression and the constant entanglements of the discourses of speciesism and racism that have emerged out of this shared root—and have enabled and continue to enable the violent animalization of *both* animals and black people. PETA’s assumed separations are only further enforced by the historical disjunctions of the comparisons themselves (“old” forms of racism juxtaposed with “new” forms of speciesism) and assume a framework that is blind to the need to address both racism and speciesism *simultaneously*.

Gregory’s description, despite and in contrast to the postracial, extensionist chronology in which it is housed, opens up an alternative to extensionism that is simultaneously anti-speciesist and anti-racist, providing an “African American resource” aimed at the construction of a “more inclusive liberation theory” that rejects the distancing maneuvers of PETA, as well as the NAACP protesters.² Such an embrace of anti-speciesist work is *embedded* in radical anti-racist work and not merely an accessory to it (as anti-racist work should necessarily be embedded in radical

anti-speciesist work) and exemplifies the “black veganism” that Syl Ko insists is essential and “*internal* to the project of black liberation” (121).³

My point is not to dismiss the NAACP protesters’ concerns; nor is it to dismiss PETA’s attempts to work for animal liberation. Rather, I want to show the ways that anti-racist and anti-speciesist concerns are actually intimately connected. Much of this book, then, calls into question the historical accuracy of a wholesale extensionist teleology of racial and animal activism in African America; in doing so, it simultaneously interrogates what has traditionally qualified (and continues to qualify) as animal activism, as it also explores how the philosophical and ethical question of the animal was integral to racial justice movements. In a similar vein, I also want to begin to consider how trivializations of the black community’s relation to and interest in animal justice reveal, despite the validity of much of these well-intentioned arguments, the facile ways we often tend to think about and define both animal and racial justice—and how an investigation of black authors and activists might challenge the assumption of necessary white privilege that runs rampant through so much of the popular and academic discourse surrounding animal activism. PETA itself institutionalizes such facile thinking—what we might even call soft racism—in another of its outreach ventures, its “furs for the homeless” campaign, in which Gregory’s assertion of an ethical intimacy of vulnerability—the radical sameness and simultaneities he proposes—is utterly dismissed. Aimed at clothing the homeless in urban areas, an increasingly and predominantly black population, “Furs for the Homeless” dictates a model of animal activism that is, by definition, limited to the privileged. Despite PETA’s proclamation on its Furisdead.com site that “there is simply *no excuse* for fur,” the premise of the campaign is that there actually *is* an “excuse”—for some people: “Because of the vast number of furs that we receive, we donate many of them to homeless people who can’t afford to buy their own coats—the only people who have any excuse to wear fur.” Fur owners are assured that, should they want to get rid of their coats, their donation will be tax deductible. More seductive, however, is the ease with which, as the website jingle claims, you “can clean your closet—and clear your conscience” in passing furs on to the less privileged. Of course, the assumption here is that the homeless are lacking not only the coats (and closets) of the wealthy but also their animal-minded consciences: PETA disallows the very possibility of a homeless person’s objecting to wearing fur. The opportunity for animal activism (if we accept the notion that donating fur qualifies as such) is relegated to those who were privileged enough to acquire fur in the first place and thus have the luxury not only of purchasing but of disposing of it. By denying the poor and the homeless the ability to act politically (and limiting them to the ability to consume what is ethically problematic in the hands [and on the backs] of another), PETA relegates them even further to the margins. In seemingly alleviating the pangs of poverty, PETA

impoverishes the poor in its denial of the very possibility of their political subjectivity and participation, ensuring that animal “activism” is, indeed, exclusively the playground of the privileged.⁴ PETA takes Wise’s point as truth: when in the face of severe adversity, humans simply cannot focus on animal issues (doing so is merely “fiddling while Rome burns”) and patronizingly hands the homeless their “excuse.”

Having introduced some of the racial and animal politics of both PETA, which declares itself “the largest animal rights organization in the world,” and several critics of both PETA and “animal rights” activism in general, I want to slow down for a moment to provide a brief history of the differences and continuities between animal welfare, animal rights (a term that, up to this point, has referred to the strain of animal activism that seeks to liberate animals from exploitation of all forms), and animal studies—as such distinctions are crucial to my argument—before moving on to a discussion of what African American studies and animal studies might learn from each other—and from the texts I examine.

Animal welfare in the United States quickly solidified as a movement in the immediate postbellum era as many former abolitionists—in a classic gesture of extensionism, one which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5—put their efforts into improving conditions for animals. This work manifested most notably in the animal protection societies that sprang up all over the nation, with widely disseminated publications and a discourse that permeated public rhetoric, making its way, for example, into nineteenth-century school textbooks. Largely indebted to the work of Jeremy Bentham, who famously argued, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?,” these welfare organizations insisted that animals needed protection from human cruelty, broadly defined as the unnecessary infliction of pain and suffering. Continuing today most visibly in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), animal welfare promotes the ideology of humaneness. Espousing the most popular and conservative brand of animal “protection,” welfarists do not, for example, argue against the slaughter of animals for meat, but work to make this killing as painless (and therefore “humane”) as possible, sidestepping and, in their assurances of humaneness, enabling the violence inherent in animal exploitation. As philosopher Cora Diamond argues, “The welfarist view is essentially that we should ease the burdens we impose on animals without getting off their backs, without ceasing to impose burdens on them, burdens that we impose because we can, because they are in general helpless to resist us” (in Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* 77).

A response and revision, in large part, to this welfarist platform, what is broadly referred to as “animal rights” emerged in the 1970s and early 80s, out of the work of Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*, 1975) and Tom Regan (*The Case for Animal Rights*, 1983), who wanted to amend what

they saw as the profound injustices of the half-measures of welfarism. Going well beyond animal welfare's "protectionist" stance, this animal rights discourse argues that a wide range of animals should not only be protected from violations to their bodily, emotional, and intellectual integrity (including slaughter, for example), but should have moral and legal standing. The rights discourse of Singer and Regan argues that ethical and legal considerations should be afforded to all animals, regardless of their species, who exhibit certain characteristics, such as the ability to anticipate pain and duress and an awareness of "self"; not to do so, Singer famously argues, is to engage in speciesism. Yet these "animal rights" are nonetheless often based upon the traditional markers of humanity such as classical agency and autonomy and thus rely on and promote extensionism. Despite its radical challenges to human hegemony, then, much of rights discourse is fully grounded in humanism's construction of "the human," which remains the rubric for consideration: the more you can be like us, animal rights ideology often seems to say, the more we will pay attention to you, reach out to you, and "include" you. Animals are to be brought under the aegis of legal protection and rights by way, ironically, of a more firmly entrenched humanism.⁵

More recently, the field of animal studies has argued for an engagement with animals that does not replicate such anthropocentrism. Cary Wolfe's groundbreaking *Animal Rites* (2003) established much of the foundation for this field, arguing that a posthumanist tack (a methodology further elaborated in *What is Posthumanism?* [2010]) should be taken in our consideration of animals as we necessarily move away from the humanist undercurrent of much animal rights discourse. Rather than merely extending our reach outwards to encompass those most like us (and thus imposing a suffocating insistence on human exceptionalism in the midst of an apparent consideration of "the other"), Wolfe argues that we should work to "alleviate the 'fundamental repression' of nonhuman subjectivity" (Pick 2) through a sustained critique of the humanist discourse of species and the institution of speciesism it supports (*Animal Rites* 2).

Wolfe insists that we must interrogate liberal humanism's construction of "the human" by working toward the eradication of extensionism in favor of a more pluralistic approach to animal being that acknowledges differences between humans and animals and also among animals themselves. While animal studies does not discount the progress that can be made within an animal rights framework, it nonetheless sees this progress as ultimately very short-term and short-sighted. As Wolfe explains:

these pragmatic pursuits are forced to work within the purview of a liberal humanism in philosophy, politics, and law that is bound by a quite historically and ideologically specific set of coordinates that, because of that very boundedness, allow one to achieve certain

pragmatic gains in the short run, but at the price of a radical shortening of a more ambitious and more profound ethical project: a new and more inclusive form of ethical pluralism that is our charge, now, to frame.

(*What is Posthumanism?* 137)

Animal studies, then, attempts to resist anthropocentrism and to acknowledge the lives and histories of animals, and, in doing so, demands the radical interrogation of the very idea of the human; Erica Fudge argues, in fact, that the history of animals can only be told *at the expense* of the human, demanding its demolition (15).

Such a historiography is seemingly in polar and dangerous opposition to one of the grand narratives of African American studies—the heroic struggle to demonstrate and claim the human status that slavery so violently denied—or, as Henry Louis Gates has described this process within a literary context, the struggle of blacks to write their way into recognition within the human community and its attendant privileges through a display of literacy, the irrefutable sign of humanity (11). This liberating graduation depended on an implicit and often explicit contrast to the subhuman status of the animal. Instead of questioning or challenging humanism’s constructions, we are assured, enslaved African Americans unequivocally desired to express and “reveal” their humanity in order to have it acknowledged within a humanist framework. The unrelenting demand for this recognition enabled and was responsible for emancipation and civil rights.⁶ The human, then, was and is not a mere idea to be deconstructed, but a way of being that, when denied, is devastating and, when acknowledged, liberating and life-giving.

These are big claims to confront, and it must be acknowledged that such an assault on the human—animal studies’ insistence on standing “next to the animal”—is potentially threatening, as black responses to the PETA exhibit so passionately express. After all, in such an inquiry the (human) stakes are seemingly highest for those whose inclusion in the human is tenuous or only very recent, making it understandable why “traditionally marginalized peoples would be skeptical about calls by academic intellectuals to surrender the humanist model of subjectivity, with all its privileges, at just the historical moment when they are poised to ‘graduate’ into it” (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 7). Yet it is precisely *because* African Americans have historically had such high stakes in—and, moreover, deep engagement with and resistance to—this model that serious scholarship on this subject is essential. After all, humanism’s discourse of species not only takes for granted the exploitation of animals but, as evidenced by slavery, can be deployed against humans just as easily. Within such an ideology *all* species, including humans, are at risk (*Animal Rites* 7). More specifically, while the effects of the discourse and institution of speciesism “fall overwhelmingly, in institutional terms, on

nonhuman animals” (*Animal Rites* 6), this discourse has also overwhelmingly affected non-white humans, most particularly blacks under slavery and systemic racism. It is precisely these risks—and the extent to which black humans have disproportionately *shared* these risks with nonhuman animals—with which the black authors and activists I examine must contend. The question becomes, then, how *do* they contend? What do they do from within a position of such shared vulnerabilities?

Gates’ description of blacks’ writing their way into white-defined humanity provokes our indignation, of course, in its underscoring of the fact that black humanity was not taken for granted and had to be proven and performed, literally petitioned for before a white audience. But can we assume that this black performance was one that always unquestioningly articulated humanism’s exclusions in the hope of attaining black inclusion? Were blacks so unequivocally seduced by such an ironic membership?

In asking these questions I want to be clear that my point is not to insist that the black authors and activists I examine completely refuse a humanist ideology or model of subjectivity; they do not (and I long believed that they could not, given the historical exigencies I have outlined above, but I am increasingly reluctant to make such exclusive claims). Rather, I draw attention to the specific places in these texts that begin to rupture liberal humanist constructions of both animality and humanity, arguing that African American literature often wrestles with the exclusivity of such a human community. As remarkable as the struggle to *claim* the human is the process by which many African Americans profoundly *unsettle* the human as they seek protection under its aegis. In locating these eruptions in a humanist landscape, I articulate a history of black relations with animals and animality that exceeds both white *and* human exceptionalism, illuminating the scope of African Americans’ search for racial justice and unearthing previously unrecognized and valuable dimensions of this struggle.

Too little has been done to examine human/animal relations in African America, much less from the posthumanist perspective that Wolfe advocates, suggesting and perpetuating yet again the perception of a seemingly impassable disconnection between racial and animal justice—and animal studies and African American studies.⁷ Michael Lundblad’s call in *The Birth of a Jungle* for a reorientation away from animal studies toward what he has coined “animality studies” underscores such a perceived disconnection in its attempts to examine the discourse of species and its deployment against marginalized humans. “[Prioritizing] questions of human cultural politics . . . with an eye toward antihomophobic, antiracist, and antisexist cultural politics” (12), Lundblad examines “how constructions of the animal have shifted historically in relation to the human, and how the discourses of human and nonhuman animality have produced various identity categories within the human” (16).

Citing Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* as a prototype for his own work, Lundblad draws attention to the ways that "representations of animality can thus point toward complex human histories, without necessarily prescribing how various human beings should treat various nonhuman beings, globally or locally" (15). While Lundblad notes that animality studies might, quite often, demonstrate the precarious nature of the categories "human" and "animal" and in this sense resemble the posthumanist approach called for by Wolfe, he argues that such a posthumanist approach is ultimately "limited in terms of its stance toward historicized cultural studies and the political stakes most often inherent in that kind of work" (13). Broadly speaking, Lundblad calls for a separation between animal studies and cultural studies; an "eye toward" (human) social justice, it would seem, often necessitates the relegation of animals to the background of scholarly and ethical consideration.

But what *are* the "political stakes" that supposedly require such an animal recession? Such a distancing maneuver is, ironically, one that the very (human) groups in which Lundblad is interested—non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual—have historically often not been able or willing to assume. My concern is that animality studies, so focused on the potential dangers of animality discourses (for marginalized humans), does not allow room to consider how these very groups might productively construct their own humanity in intimate and ethical relation to animality and animals themselves. I am ultimately interested, then, in the theoretical work that Wolfe calls for, which allows for an excavation of worn-out ways of thinking about both human and animal justice, past and present. Such a theoretical approach does not presumptively dismiss animals in the study of black-centered justice movements and, moreover, does not assume that these movements dismissed animals, either.

That being said, I think Lundblad offers a very useful and insightful clarification of some of the differences between animality and animal studies, and I place these methodologies in conversation with each other (as Lundblad himself does in his own work) in my examination of the white destruction of animal and black lives. But this is only a starting point, if it can even be called that, for it is the black responses to this violence, which enact another mode of *being*, that mark the critical difference. I trace the ways these black authors and activists reconceive the privileges and assumptions surrounding traditional humanist notions of "advocacy" and teleologies of justice, as they put into practice what we might call, at the risk of complicating already complex modes of analysis, *critical* animality studies.

Because of the dangers of the discourse of species for marginalized humans, Lundblad understandably calls for animality studies. Yet the concession he seems to think is necessary—the prerequisite (both scholarly and black) sacrifice of the animal—potentially obfuscates the very nature of black advocacy. To work with Lundblad's own terminology,

to which I am indebted, I am thinking about those authors who practice critical animality studies from *within* and not from without animality and who engage with discourses of animality in ways that open up the current fields of both animal and animality studies today. These visionary thinkers within the black community enact other ways of being human that exceed the assumptions of animality studies and, more broadly speaking, liberal humanism: they begin, in many ways, at the juncture that animality studies asks scholars to stop.

Recent scholarly work in African American environmental studies proves particularly useful in thinking through and beyond some of the schisms and assumptions that animality studies perpetuates. Jeffrey Myers' *Converging Stories: Race, Ecology, and Environmental Justice*, for example, has argued for another look, within the African American literary canon, at the apparent divide between black-led racial justice movements and traditionally white-led and membered activist movements interested in the natural world. Focusing specifically on the intersection of environmental and racial issues, Myers points out that "social justice has often been treated separately from environmentalism, both within activism and politics as well as within the corresponding academic realms of literary criticism and history" ("Other Nature" 18).⁸ The convergence by both racial justice activists and environmental activists on the issue of environmental justice, however, has exposed the deep connections between environmental degradation (revising our ideas of what entails degradation) and racism (illuminating the environmental grounding of much racism). Myers demonstrates how the politics of organizations such as the Sierra Club, long propelled by white privilege, might be revised by a group like the NAACP, as the Sierra Club might also help, in turn, to revise the politics of the NAACP. The synthesis of two apparently antithetical movements, the field of environmental justice ultimately demonstrates how intimately connected and intertwined the concerns of these two campaigns are. I aim to make a similar move in *Race Matters, Animal Matters*: in asking what organizations like PETA and the NAACP have to learn from each other, I interrogate the unexamined assumptions of established political and critical ventures.

Kimberly Ruffin, in *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*, similarly examines the history of what she sees as black alienation from traditional environmental activism, asking, "How might people estranged from mainstream environmentalism find a way to reclaim the environmentalist issue?" (7). Part of her answer rests, as does Myers', in a move away from the conservationist strain of environmentalism and toward environmental justice.

Ruffin questions the supposed benefits of traditional environmentalism, which she argues is defined by "a limited triumvirate of Ws: the wilderness, the West, and whiteness" (25), and which extols, almost exclusively, the transparent virtues of a "direct encounter with a distant wilderness"

(26). Precisely the environmentalism that served as backdrop to Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, in which he describes how his awe and appreciation for nature was achieved and reinforced by family summer camping trips, such a recreational environmentalism, Ruffin contends, largely depends on privilege. In the same vein, Richard White argues that "environmentalists so often seem self-righteous, privileged, and arrogant because they so readily consent to identifying nature only with play and making it by definition a place where leisured humans come only to visit, and not to work, stay, or live" (in Ruffin 26–27). Ruffin, like White and Myers, shifts away from an experience with nature that is dictated by and dependent on privilege and leisure to one experienced through daily work. "Nature" is not something known only in detachments and vacations from the everyday and the mundane (literally, *of this earth*), but in the intimacies of the familiar and local. In opening up an ecocritical discussion to the mundaneness of labor, Ruffin redirects the energies of environmental activism, asking us to consider another inconvenient truth: "What does it mean when work is compounded by the inconvenient history of slavery? What happens when work and enslavement influence our discussions about ecology in contemporary America?" (27–28). Charting the early "ecoliterary traditions" of African America along the coordinates of work, slavery, and nature, Ruffin articulates a theory of "ecological burden and beauty" in which, as the flap copy summarizes, "African American authors underscore the ecological burdens of living within human hierarchies in the social order just as they explore the ecological beauty of being a part of the natural order." More specifically—and crucial to the sensitive critical work I undertake—it is these authors' position "at the bottom," as Ruffin describes it, that informs their ecoliterary traditions:

Experienced with the triumphs and troubles of life among those at the bottom of human hierarchies, African Americans have a keen knowledge of the ecological implications of social systems; at the same time, their closeness to nonhuman nature, both forced and voluntary, gives them an opportunity to reflect on how these social systems have ecological impacts for nonhumans.

(20)

While "they bear the burden of a historical and present era of environmental alienation . . . they also come from and transform cultural traditions that enable—in fact, encourage—human and nonhuman affinity" (16).

Building on Ruffin's theorization of this "human and nonhuman affinity" and "closeness to nonhuman nature, both forced and voluntary," I argue that African American literature attests to both the incredible dangers—and opportunities—of a closeness not only to nonhuman nature but specifically to nonhuman *animal* nature, demonstrating the beauty

of closeness even while caught within the dangers and burdens of that closeness.

If, as Ruffin contends, “blacks were *ecological agents* before the emergence of American nature writing” (emphasis mine) and “their perspectives are critical to understanding the full scope of ecological thought,” the same can and should be said for their relations with animals; African Americans, I argue, were *animal agents* long before animal rights or even animal welfare movements existed in the United States, and their perspectives are essential to understanding the full scope of thinking on both human and animal liberation. Recorded in ledgers alongside animals, sold and “bred” as domesticated “livestock,” hunted like wild animals, and stripped, as animals are, of rights to bodily integrity, it actually makes sense (as counterintuitive as this may initially seem) that they became animal agents, “given a history of having been thought of in exactly those terms,” to read Wise’s phrase against the grain. Crucially, this “agency” most certainly does not—often because it cannot—fit the traditional mode of speaking *for* animals, of arguing from the distancing privileges of the human for the consideration of animal existence (extensionism’s get-your-own-rights-and-*then*-fight-for-animals model). Rather, it resides in the original and violent dehumanization of African Americans, which occurred in its most extreme form under the antebellum system of slavery and during the Jim Crow era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the American South. Bringing together, as I also revise recent strains of animal studies, animality studies, and African American studies, I examine those places in African American literature—in both canonical and non-canonical texts alike—that chafe against extensionism and instead exude the intimacy⁹ of human/animal relations and being, opening up to a different and deeper approach to animal ethics grounded in African America’s animal agency, which is itself rooted in both the burdens and beauties of this existence. This animal agency ranges from the fully conscious and intentional to more latent, non-intentional agentic forms of intimacy.

This agency and the alternatives to traditional activism that it embodies go deep—far beyond PETA’s detached and easy donations and “practical” extensionist teleologies—and are themselves grounded in the intimacies and, to invoke Ruffin, mundaneness of human/animal relations that force humanism’s separation of human and animal to give way to “closeness” and even, at times, “sameness.” In redirecting attention to these intimacies, I turn African American studies, in a sense, inside out. My focus, for example, is not on how slaves shake off animal status in moving into the human, but how, at pivotal (and long overlooked) moments, they hold fast to the shared vulnerabilities of animality and animals themselves in making such a move, resisting humanism’s exclusions as they simultaneously seek the (necessary because often life-sustaining) privileges these exclusions afford them. I shift the heroics of the canon away from an

exclusionary move into the human and toward a consideration of how African America has often rehabilitated degraded “animality,” both animal and human, in the midst of atrocity. More broadly speaking, I explore the ways that such a black recuperation of animality—and often animals themselves—makes radical and ethical use of dehumanization.

Anat Pick’s challenging work on Jewish remembrance of the Holocaust similarly asks what might actually be *recuperated* from dehumanization:

Dehumanization as a strategy of oppression has a long and iniquitous history. Few if any events in recent European history illustrate the negative workings of dehumanization more profoundly or decisively than the Holocaust . . . [but] while the Holocaust performed a violent unraveling of human identity, disclosing human contingency and the genocidal impulses inherent in striving for human perfection, much of the scholarly and popular legacy of the atrocity has been, oddly, the restitution and rehabilitation of humanism.

Pick is “interested in whether and how dehumanization can be reclaimed as, at least partly, positive,” claiming that “animal studies at its most ambitious could be thought as a way of reshaping (contracting) the humanities and social sciences under the sign of *dehumanization*” (6).

Such a consideration of the potential productivity of dehumanization is the task of posthumanist studies, which adamantly resists “a ‘new and improved’ theory of the subject (as rights-holding agent)” in favor of “what comes after the subject.” As Wolfe elaborates, “It is in the wake of this ‘after’” that much may be realized “in ways not accountable, either philosophically or ethically, by the basic coordinates of liberal humanism” (*What is Posthumanism?* 127–128). Borrowing from as much as he radically revises, for example, Donna Haraway’s theory of the cyborg, which is often viewed as the inaugural work of posthumanism, and its challenge to the fantasy of splendid autonomy that humanism supports, posthumanist studies asserts that ethical work lies in these chippings away at the human that reveal its impurities and contingencies.

So how might the deeply challenging work of animal studies and, specifically, its posthumanist insistence be relevant to the study of African American literature, a literature that largely speaks out of a subject position that is violently denied the privileges of humanity under humanism? It might seem as if we are traveling over old territory at this point, repeating earlier questions about African American subject formation, but my point here is to consider the methodology by which we approach this subject formation. Is the theoretical apparatus of posthumanist studies, an epistemology specific to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, methodologically germane to African American literature? In other words, can a posthumanist approach to African American literature be relevant, much less appropriate, in an examination of authors

who are so desperately striving to secure the privileges of humanism—to move *into*, it would seem, and not *beyond*, humanism.

In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker argues that modernism, a movement long associated with exclusively white artists and intellectuals such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and its emphasis on a “putting back together” of the pieces shattered by World War I, is an existential framework inappropriate to African American literature and culture of the period. The Harlem Renaissance, long seen as a failure under such a white modernist rubric, Baker argues, was not about putting the pieces of a fractured identity back together; rather, it was about piecing together literal survival: coming up with economic and material goods in order to sustain individual and community. “Modernism” meant something entirely different for African America than it did for European America.

Baker’s point is not that the theory of white modernism should simply be discarded. Rather, he works to reveal how a supposedly culture-neutral movement is one that has been limited to historically specific white concerns and exclusions surrounding identity and subjectivity. Posthumanism arguably falls prey to these same racial limitations in its uni-directional assault on humanism (the “post” of posthumanism). At the same time, however, posthumanist theory provides an essential theoretical framework that *allows for* a radical interrogation of the seemingly transparent and homogeneous “human,” a term which largely “[ignores] the unequal experience of humanness” (Ruffin 19), opening up other ways of thinking about humanness and race. As Wolfe explains, posthumanist theory

actually enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection, and so on. It forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience.

(*What is Posthumanism?* xxv)

Given posthumanist interrogations, it is not, then, the “humanism” part of posthumanism that is the catch, but the “post” part. While posthumanism allows us to consider restrictions imposed by and under humanism, it is, by definition, a move, ethically and historically, beyond humanism, one that occurs *after* humanism.¹⁰ This trajectory makes various assumptions about how humanism works as an ideological model of subjectivity, the most basic of which is that this model can only be interrogated after the fact—after one’s inclusion. Such an interrogation emerges out of privilege and assumes an exploration to be launched, yet again, from a detached purview—from a humanity that, for practical

purposes, is quite secure within the human; the way posthumanism is done, then, starts to look suspiciously like the very thing it is working against: extensionism. The difference—and this is a big and important difference—is that the nonhuman is considered as a result of theoretical “contraction,” not extension, a contraction that is deeply and radically *expansive* in its apprehension of differences.

My point here is to insist that we pay attention to those moments when the human is explicitly denied and subsequently and explicitly *sought*. How might dehumanization *positively* inform the move *into* a new kind of humanism, one that, while it does not reject, casts doubt on the exclusions of humanism and, in this sense, resembles posthumanism? And how is the human revised to allow for alternative ways of being human? In other words, as “we” find ourselves in a space after the human, it becomes crucial to examine that space before the human, that space most dangerously, tenuously, and often beautifully occupied by African Americans in the long history of humanism’s discriminations and exclusions: what comes *before* the subject that is the human, I argue, offers as ethically challenging and fertile ground as, from the framework of posthumanism, what comes *after* the subject. Moreover, in examining this “space before” through what I call *fugitive humanism*, we not only apprehend the inherent fragility of humanism, but are also able to view a lived morality that revises without indulging in what Cora Diamond refers to as the “deflections” of philosophy (11–12), where *moving into the human* is potentially simultaneous with a new way of *being human*. As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has argued, “far too often, gestures toward the ‘post’ or the ‘beyond’ effectively ignore praxes of humanity and critiques produced by black people, particularly those praxes which are irreverent toward the normative production of ‘the human’ or illegible from within the terms of its logic” (215–216).

In Jennifer Mason’s *Civilized Creatures*, she includes the following 1869 letter of support from an ex-slave, who identifies himself only as J.G.T., to the brand-new animal welfare periodical *Our Dumb Animals* (the publication of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, formed in 1868):

I was a slave, sold seventeen times, parted from my family four times, remained in bondage forty-three years. I made my escape by being a house servant, and by learning to win the affections of the savage hounds.

I was seventeen days on my way to a land of freedom, without food except when I occasionally obtained fruit, nuts, and so forth. I was often pursued by the hounds, but could quell them immediately. They would quietly guide me on my journey some ways, then wagging their tails would seem to bid me good-bye. Thank Heaven, through the assistance of God and the hounds I gained my freedom.

It has been my fervent desire ever since I could remember that some means might be taken to protect the poor animals from cruel treatment. I treat my animals as I desire to be treated, and hope every humane soul will pursue the same course. May God bless your efforts.
(in Mason 131)

For Mason, this letter shows that “for at least one man, experience of canine friendship during slavery translated directly into a desire to support the country’s newly established animal welfare organizations” (131). The work has not yet been done that would determine just how common similar letters of black support (and the usual accompanying donations) to these newly emerging societies were. Undoubtedly, however, and as she concedes, the number was low; the vast majority of black Americans had little money, and whatever donations they did manage to scrape together probably went to poorly funded organizations struggling to support the black community (131). In all likelihood, the letter is an anomaly.

Such a dearth of black support for animal protection, however, has as much to do with the limitations of the overwhelmingly white-led animal welfare movement as the limitations of African American resources and should not be read as reflective of black indifference to animals. J.G.T.’s letter, in other words, may certainly be the exception in its explicit support for organized animal protection, but it is not exceptional in the profound intimacy of the interspecies relations it describes, and what interests me is the deficiency—not the directness—of the purported “translation” that occurs in the movement from animal friendship to animal protection, which is here congruent with the transition from slavery to freedom. It is in the losses that the letter charts, which accrue and culminate in its explicit support for animal welfare, that the deficiencies of humanism echo—and we can begin to apprehend the fugitive humanism that J.G.T. practiced in his literal fugitive state and fondly—even longingly—now remembers.

The letter is a heartwarming story of courage, friendship, and, at first glance, successes enabled by humanism and extensionism. While a slave, J.G.T. manages to “win the affections” of weaponized animals—the ubiquitous hellhounds of slavery, no less—and they voluntarily guide him during his escape. No longer prosthetics of white racism, the hounds enable black liberation, leading the way north as they guide the fugitive slave down the path to an acknowledgment of black humanity. Attributing the attainment of his freedom to God and the hounds and harboring a “fervent desire ever since I could remember to protect the poor animals from cruel treatment,” J.G.T., having secured his humanity, is able to share some of his good fortune with those animals needing help. Having found his way out of slavery and into freedom, he can now finally really care *for* animals.

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