Classifying and dividing labor

The political economy of racializing surveillance

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Introduction

According to Andrea Smith (2015, 23), “Surveillance studies’s focus on the modern state similarly hides an analysis of the settler colonialist and white supremacist logics of surveillance that precede the ascendancy of the modern state.” Indeed, surveillance studies has not yet fully explored the colonial genealogies of surveillance. In the United States, both the modern administrative state itself and the surveillance practices that have helped and continue to help produce and reproduce it have both a settler colonialist and white supremacist genealogy. In this chapter, I will not only draw out the colonial genealogy of racializing surveillance but also show that contemporary surveillance ultimately serves to secure a neocolonial political economy based on racial divisions within the working class.

Simone Browne (2015, 16) defines racializing surveillance as a “technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a ‘power to define what is in or out of place.’” David Lyon suggests that we ought to understand “surveillance as social sorting” in order to tease out the “classifying drive of contemporary surveillance” (Lyon 2003, 13). Surveillance undoubtedly serves the purpose of social sorting, and this holds particularly true for racializing surveillance. Yet, this leaves open the question as to what the purpose of social sorting is. In capitalist social formations a key function of social sorting, although not the only one, is to secure the conditions for capitalist accumulation. In this chapter, I will argue that racializing surveillance is, above all, a colonial technology for (re)producing racial divisions within the US working class while also drawing out the dialectical relations between transparency and opacity in contemporary US racializing surveillance. For, ultimately, contemporary racializing surveillance obscures not only its settler colonial *and* colonial genealogy but also its contemporary neocolonial ontology. Drawing on (neo-)Marxian theory, I will first map how capitalist accumulation was not only historically enabled by settler colonialism *and* colonialism but continues to depend on a neocolonial logic of oppression

that combines “ordinary” exploitation with racialized expropriation and disposability. Second, I will show how capitalist expropriation and disposability in the United States have been and continue to be facilitated by practices of racializing surveillance. Lastly, I will argue that as a key manifestation of racializing surveillance in the contemporary United States, welfare surveillance reproduces neocolonial racial divisions under the conditions of formal legal equality and professed colorblindness.

Race and the exploitation, expropriation, and disposability of labor

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx begins his critique of political economy with an analysis of the commodity. Marx makes a distinction between the concrete qualitative uses to which commodities can be put—their use value—and their quantitative relation to all other commodities—their exchange value. Nonetheless, despite their material differences and their fundamentally different use values, all commodities are products of labor (Marx 1976). The amount of labor that goes into the production of commodities makes for their commensurability. This is expressed by the concept of value, which Marx (1976, 129) defines as “socially necessary labour time”—the average amount of labor time that goes into the production of a particular commodity at a given place, at a given time. Socially necessary labor time thus determines a commodity’s value, which is, in turn, represented by exchange value in relation to other commodities and which is ultimately expressed in terms of a price. Marx goes on to examine the process of commodity exchange and finds that under the conditions of a competitive market for commodities, sustained profits cannot arise from exchange. All market participants try to buy cheaply and sell dearly, and some of them may indeed obtain some profit because, due to the ebb and flow of supply and demand, prices do not always correspond to a commodity’s value. But as each seller is also a buyer, profits are fleeting; if one market participant is able to sell particularly dearly today, she may have to buy more expensively tomorrow. In short, because of market competition the price of each commodity will ultimately even out around a commodity’s actual value so that profits are ephemeral (Marx 1976).

Yet, capitalists do find one commodity on the market that can create more than its original value. This is the peculiar commodity of labor power. Labor power also has a value, namely the socially necessary labor time for producing the commodities needed to sustain a laborer at a historically and geographically specific standard of living (Marx 1976). The value of labor power is reproduced after a certain time, but if laborers are made to work longer and/or more intensively than required to reproduce the value of their labor power, the capitalist has obtained surplus value. This is the Marxian definition of exploitation: the contractual obligation of laborers to work longer and/or more intensively than necessary to produce the value of the commodities

workers need to sustain themselves at a given standard of living, at a given place, at a given time (Marx 1976). Exploitation is the source of surplus value, which capitalists can consume away and/or reinvest. However, the continuous productive reinvestment of at least some portion of surplus value is what ultimately defines the capitalist. This is what capitalist accumulation is all about: the constant reinvestment of past profits to generate even more profits in the future (Marx 1976).

Marx thus shows that capitalist accumulation ultimately hinges on the commodification of labor power and the concomitant exploitation of the laborer. The commodification of labor power in turn centers on two conditions: (1) generalized commodity exchange based on the large-scale monetization of economic relations; and (2) processes of proletarianization. Yet, whereas the imperative of capital accumulation has become an almost universal social force, processes of proletarianization have unfolded unevenly and continue to be highly particularistic. According to Étienne Balibar (1991b, 161–2), proletarianization entails three separate social processes that cannot be solely derived from the purely economic contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production. First, *exploitation*, as outlined above, consists of the extraction of surplus labor (and hence also surplus value) by having laborers work above and beyond the actual value of their labor power. Second, through mechanization, automation, and the rationalization of the labor process laborers come under the ever more direct control and surveillance of the capitalist or her representatives for the duration of their labor time. This is what Marx (1976) called the shift from the formal to the real subsumption of labor under capital. Thus, the commodification of labor power also entails the *domination* of labor by capital at the workplace. Both exploitation and domination are conditioned by locally specific forms of contract law and local variations in how the formal freedom and equality of the public sphere (including the market) is demarcated from the private sphere of production (Marx 1976). Thirdly, laborers also bear the economic risks and associated insecurity of having to sell their labor power. They are exposed to market fluctuations, crises, and a trend toward rendering labor power superfluous through increasing investment in labor-saving machinery. Laborers thus also compete against one another in the labor market. Divisions and hierarchies within the working class both exacerbate *competition* between workers and are also compounded by it, as workers mobilize these divisions and hierarchies not only in making their economic claims but also in expressing their opposition to their own oppression (Balibar 1991a, 214). This spatially and temporally uneven development of proletarianization is, on the one hand, the result of the historical processes that prompted proletarianization in the first place and, on the other, due to the fact that labor power is what Karl Polanyi called a fictitious commodity (Polanyi 1957, 75).

Firstly, proletarianization came about through a set of brutal historical processes that Marx called primitive accumulation. Primitive accumulation

violently divested numerous people from their means of production and/or subsistence—primarily land—and also provided a large influx of precious metals into Europe, which led to increasing monetization, which in turn helped generalize commodity exchange (Marx 1976). Primitive accumulation occurred both in the colonial periphery and the metropolitan core, but with a key difference: whereas in Europe the large-scale dispossession of people mostly drove them into wage labor, the colonized were frequently forced into forms of unpaid labor. The imposition of various coercive colonial labor regimes was, moreover, entangled with the development of racial ideologies. Racial ideologies developed in the context of and as a direct consequence of the colonial conquest of the Americas, where, as the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000, 533) puts it, “[t]he conquistadors assumed this idea [of race] as the constitutive, founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed.” In the United States, the ideology of “race” developed through the codification of differences between free and enslaved people in order to justify and reproduce slavery “in a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights, and, more important a republic in which those doctrines seemed to represent accurately the world in which all but a minority lived” (Fields and Fields 2014, 141). From the foundation of the American republic, racism and class oppression have thus been inextricably intertwined. African Americans became a “race” because of the violent expropriation of their labor power—in short, because of their violently imposed class position as enslaved people (Fields and Fields 2014, 266–7). The ideology of “race” persisted even after the class position from which it originally derived was abolished. The ideology of “race” has undoubtedly undergone profound historical changes, but it still serves to justify various forms of racism—that is to say, forms of differential treatment alleged to result from ultimately fictitious innate differences of the individuals and/or groups who are the victims of discrimination. This is what Fields and Fields (2014, 261 and 97) call “the social alchemy of racecraft [which] transforms racism into race” so that “[d]isguised as race, racism becomes something Afro-Americans are, rather than something racists do.” Particular populations are thus “racialized” because they are the targets of racism and not the other way around. Even though racism is no longer directly tied to the class position of enslaved people, in capitalist social formations in general, and in the United States in particular, racism still serves to reproduce labor power below its value and “to exclude populations from the labor market” (Grosfoguel 2003, 210). As Immanuel Wallerstein puts it:

A capitalist system that is expanding (which is half the time) needs all the labour-power it can find, since this labour is producing the goods through which more capital is produced, realized and accumulated. Ejection out of the system is pointless. But if one wants to maximize the accumulation of capital, it is necessary simultaneously to minimize the costs of

production (hence the costs of labour-power) and minimize the costs of political disruption (hence minimize – not eliminate, because one cannot eliminate – the protests of the labour force). Racism is the magic formula that reconciles these objectives.

(Wallerstein 1991b, 33)

Indeed, capitalism has never been colorblind, and racism continues to play a significant role in facilitating capitalist accumulation.

Colonial violence, racism, and expropriation were, indeed, pivotal for the eventual expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Colonialism is widely held to have ended with the independence of most former colonies. Yet, a number of scholars argue that coloniality persists despite the abolition of colonial forms of labor control and the independence of former colonies (Grosfoguel 2003; Pinderhughes 2011; Quijano 2000). A hierarchical division of labor along the lines of race and ethnicity “continues to be an integral part of the contemporary global division of labor even after independence and the global expansion of the capitalist wage-labor relation” (Grosfoguel 2003, 146). In fact, “the entanglement of capitalist accumulation processes with a racial/ethnic hierarchy and its derivative classifications of superior/inferior, developed/undeveloped, and civilized/barbarian people” constitutes a global coloniality even in the absence of any formal colonial system of rule (Grosfoguel 2003, 17; see also Quijano 2000). This situation should be termed neocolonial in order to highlight both the ruptures (abolition of colonial labor control, granting of formally equal rights, some forms of self-rule, etc.) and the continuities (racial/ethnic division of labor, persistence of racism) between classical colonialism and contemporary neocoloniality. Primitive accumulation articulated a division between “free” and “unfree” labor upon a division between superior and inferior humans. In fact, unfree laborers in the colonies were not exploited in the strict Marxian sense, but their labor power was violently expropriated. The analytical distinction between exploitation and expropriation is a crucial one, and I will discuss its historical and contemporary significance in greater detail below.

Secondly, the uneven processes of proletarianization are also due to the peculiar nature of the commodity of labor power. The economic value of labor power—the socially necessary labor time that goes into the production of the commodities needed to sustain a laborer—only accounts for the bare life of the laborer. Yet, all sorts of immaterial and unquantifiable factors are required for the production and reproduction of the human bearers of labor power: love, care, education, meaningful social relations in general, etc. Indeed, labor power has come to be exchanged as a commodity, but it is hardly if ever produced as a commodity. This has led Karl Polanyi to treat labor power as a fictitious commodity—alongside land and money (Polanyi 1957, 71–80). The very fiction that labor, land, and money are commodities is what allows for their exchange as commodities, and their exchange

as commodities is, in turn, a basic condition for capitalist accumulation. Polanyi further argues that extending markets to labor, land, and money not only required a separation between economy and society but also reshaped society into a market society. The colonization of social relations by labor markets, in particular, led to major social dislocations. For, “[t]o allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society” (Polanyi 1957, 76). Society had to respond to these dislocations, giving rise to what Polanyi calls a “double movement”:

Social history in the nineteenth century was thus the result of a double movement: the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction in respect to fictitious ones.

(Polanyi 1957, 79)

In order to ensure the continuous availability of these fictitious commodities as crucial factors for the capitalist mode of production, to maintain the fiction of their status as commodities, and to secure social stability and hence also the capitalist mode of production itself from the social dislocations caused by processes of fictitious commodification, capitalism requires what Nancy Fraser calls “background conditions of possibility” (Fraser 2014). The aforementioned processes of proletarianization—exploitation, domination, and competition—already indicate that the commodification of labor power is at once an economic and a political phenomenon. Marx himself went beyond exchange into the hidden abode of production to show that the expansion of value does not arise out of exchange but from the exploitation of labor. Moreover, Marx showed how the concentration of private property in the means of production and the commodification of labor power was ultimately brought about by primitive accumulation, that is to say, by state-sanctioned force, theft, and plunder. Throughout *Capital*, Marx also hints at the necessity of state power to prop up an already established capitalist mode of production. However, the main thrust of his argument—except for the section on primitive accumulation—tends to unfold within the parameters of bourgeois political economy: perfectly functioning competitive markets and minimal state interference. Marx’s critique of bourgeois political economy is, for the most part, a critique of the capitalist mode of production in the abstract and not of concrete capitalist social formations.

Nancy Fraser, however, argues that capitalism ought to be understood as an institutionalized social order that demarcates and depends on external spheres that not only provide labor power and means of production below value but also ultimately help secure capitalism from its own crisis tendencies as well as from working-class opposition. She suggests that we shift the focus

“from the front-story of exploitation to the back-story of expropriation” (Fraser 2014, 60). From this perspective, the exploitation of laborers and thus the expansion of capital centers on the continuing expropriation of nature, the unremunerated work of women, and the deployment of state power to secure the conditions for capitalist accumulation. Consequently, primitive accumulation does not just constitute “the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital” but ought to be seen as an ongoing process (Marx 1976, 875). The violent expropriation of labor and means of production from spheres outside the capitalist mode of production is a structural necessity, especially in response to periodic crises. What is more, primitive accumulation entailed and continues to entail the accumulation of divisions and hierarchies within the working class—divisions and hierarchies that became codified and naturalized in terms of race and gender (Federici 2004, 63–4).

If all commodities, including labor power, are sold and bought at their value, the exploitation of labor is the only source of surplus value. Yet, even though the capitalist mode of production relies on commodity circulation for realizing the value (and surplus value) of its outputs, capitalists still scramble to get their inputs (labor power and means of production) from outside of commodity circulation proper, that is to say, below value or even for free. This has considerable consequences for how we conceive of the working class, because not all members of the working class are wage laborers. What defines the working class is that it creates (surplus) value for capitalists (Wallerstein 1991a, 120).

Workers may get to keep some of the value they create (e.g., in the form of a wage) but never all of it. If a worker gets to keep that portion of the overall value of her product that corresponds to the value of the commodities needed to reproduce herself at a given standard of living at a given place at a given time, she is “merely” being exploited. If she gets less than the value of her labor power, her labor power is being expropriated. What is more, workers worldwide tend to live in households where they pool a variety of different income streams: wage income, subsistence production, petty commodity production, rent, and transfer payments (Wallerstein 2004, 32–4). The degree of proletarianization is thus the proportion of household income derived from wage labor as opposed to other sources of household income. Indeed, the proportion of household income derived from wage income in relation to a household’s participation in capitalist surplus production thus ultimately determines the degree of exploitation/expropriation of both the overall household and its individual members. In short, expropriation has not only historically enabled exploitation but also continues to complement it, especially in response to crisis. Expropriation and exploitation are therefore two fundamental logics of oppression inherent in capitalist accumulation. However, we should note that exploitation and expropriation are mere approximations. Empirical reality affords very few examples of “pure” exploitation or “pure”

expropriation, although chattel slavery is a clear case of expropriation in its purest and most brutal sense.

Capitalist accumulation also gives rise to a third mode of oppression: the logic of disposability. Marx argued that continuous changes in the organic composition of capital, that is to say, changes in the relation between constant capital (especially technology and machinery) and variable capital (labor power), tend toward the creation of a surplus population whose labor power is no longer needed (Marx 1976, 782–98). A racialized population who was subject to violent expropriation in the past and whose subsequent exploitation has always contained elements of expropriation through labor market segmentation and discrimination is also more likely to become disproportionately superfluous as a result of technological and organizational changes in production.

Capitalists' scramble for cheap labor power and the concomitant expropriation, exploitation, and disposability of the working class not only allows for the continuing accumulation of capital but also for the accumulation of local, regional, national, and global divisions within the working class. These divisions feed competition between members of the working class, which may in turn further entrench these divisions. In short, divisions within the working class are both a condition for and a consequence of capitalist accumulation while also playing a key role in pacifying working-class struggles. Yet, capitalism cannot secure these divisions by purely economic means. State power in general and state surveillance in particular provide the very infrastructure for maintaining and calibrating divisions within the working class to the degree best suited to continuing capitalist accumulation. State power is thus not only a tool for securing the conditions for continuous expropriation and exploitation but also for managing a disposable, economically superfluous population.

Racializing surveillance in the United States (settler) colonial past and present

The contemporary US capitalist social order has been shaped and continues to be shaped by both the *settler colonial* expropriation of land and the *colonial* expropriation of labor power. According to Lorenzo Veracini, settler colonialism and colonialism are two distinct relations:

On the one hand, the colonial “encounter” is mirrored by what I have theorized as a settler colonial “non-encounter,” a circumstance fundamentally shaped by a recurring need to disavow the presence of indigenous “others.” On the other hand, in the case of colonial systems, a determination to exploit sustains a drive to sustain the permanent subordination of the colonized (Veracini 2011, 2).

Although, I am in broad agreement with Veracini's argument that “[c]olonialism *reproduces* itself” and “settler colonialism, by contrast,

extinguishes, itself,” I do not think that colonialism can be associated with exploitation (Veracini 2011, 3). Both settler colonialism and colonialism are forms of primitive accumulation expressed by different modalities of expropriation. Settler colonialism expropriates indigenous lands, which frequently entails efforts to make indigenous populations invisible. This is why settler colonialism is marked by a logic of elimination (Wolfe 2006). On the other hand, colonialism’s expropriation of labor power requires the presence and, at least partial, visibility of the expropriated workers. Their presence cannot be disavowed, and their continuing expropriation needs to be justified. This is why colonial relations are much more likely to give rise to explicit racial ideologies. I am far from saying that racial ideologies are absent from settler colonial relations, but in the United States, at least, it was the colonial regime of slavery that prompted the development of a racial black–white binary and the associated practices of racializing surveillance. In the case of the United States, the visibility of racialized others brought about by the racializing expropriation of labor power perhaps also obscures the settler colonial expropriation of land that provided the conditions of possibility for the subsequent importation of enslaved people.

Chattel slavery constituted a form of colonial labor control defined by the brutal subordination and oppression of enslaved people for the purpose of coercively expropriating their labor power. Slavery was, moreover, entangled with international systems of banking, insurance, and credit, and it also contributed to the rise of industrialization, first in Britain and later in the American north (see Baptist 2014; Johnson 2013; Oakes 2016). Simone Browne suggests that

slavery must be engaged if we are to create a surveillance studies that grapple with its constitutive genealogies, where the archive of slavery is taken up in a way that does not replicate the racial schema that spawned it and that it reproduced, but at the same time does not erase its violence.
(Browne 2015, 13)

Indeed, as the Southern slave plantation system became ever more closely entwined with global capitalist commodity circulation—through its main cash crop cotton—plantation owners developed increasingly sophisticated strategies of surveillance and control in order to extract ever more labor and hence also value from their slaves. Caitlin Rosenthal (2018) shows that Southern cotton planters combined sophisticated management techniques with violence to improve the productivity of slave labor. In fact, slave owners’ techniques for monitoring and measuring productivity foreshadowed Fredrick Winslow Taylor’s tools of scientific management. The fact that enslaved people were subject to much more intensive and extensive domination than “free” wage laborers meant that slave owners could and did exercise much more control over the labor process than industrial capitalists. Moreover, slave owners

measured and classified enslaved people not only as a captive input to production but also as a form of alienable commodity capital whose value could either appreciate or depreciate over time (Rosenthal 2018).

Wage labor centers on the commodification of labor power. The bearers of this peculiar commodity remain its owners and can sell it as they see fit, although often under highly unfavorable conditions. Yet, once sold, laborers no longer fully control their labor power and have no legal rights to the products of their labor apart from their wages. The contractual exchange of labor power for a money wage is what ultimately allows for exploitation. Slavery, on the other hand, entailed the (almost) total commodification of people themselves. Slaves had neither legal ownership of their labor power, nor could they exert much (if any) control over it. They did not work over and above the value of their labor power to produce surplus value, because the value of their labor power did no longer belong to them. Their labor power had been violently expropriated through their enslavement and was now completely owned by their master. Thus, the surplus value produced by slaves—that is to say, the value they produced over and above their own exchange value as slaves and the value of the commodities needed to keep them alive—is not a product of exploitation in the Marxian sense but of violent expropriation.

The commodification of humans ultimately depended on the definition and enforcement of property rights as well as on the classifications—to be found in ledgers, bills of sale, etc.—that marked people as commodities. Enslaved people were ripped out of their communities and stripped of all the customs, hierarchies, social distinctions, and identities that characterized their previous way of life in order to become subject to the commodifying classifications around productivity and value imposed by the slave trade and the plantation system. However, precisely because enslaved people were humans and not commodities, efforts to commodify them required such horrific forms of violence. Enslaved people did not voluntarily submit to their commodification. In order to become commodities, they constantly needed to be violently subjected to a process of commodification by means of surveillance and violence. And even then, they retained and struggled to assert their humanity (Rinehart 2016; Rosenthal 2018). As Rosenthal demonstrates, the written records of the surveillance and management practices used in and for the profitable commodification of enslaved people both obscure the violence inherent to slavery and also highlight the necessary brutality of a mode of production that feeds on humans as commodities (Rosenthal 2018, 187–205).

The growing size of the slave population was, moreover, considered a massive social control problem. The threat of slave insurrection and the constant risk of slave flight led to the emergence of increasingly formalized slave patrols. The first slave patrols were formed in the seventeenth century and were informal bands of volunteers tasked with recapturing runaway slaves. In the course of the eighteenth century, slave patrols became more

organized and were also charged with preventing insurrection. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 gave state governments wide-ranging authority to recruit individuals—especially poor whites—into slave patrols that now had almost unlimited coercive powers over the slave population. Slave patrols were tasked with the routine surveillance of the slave population in order to regulate and manage their movement according to the politico-economic imperatives of chattel slavery (Bass 2001, 159; Brucato 2014, 38–9). In fact, slave patrols are a significant strand in the genealogy of US police (Bass 2001; Brucato 2014; Hadden 2001).

Brutal efforts to control the movement, and hence also the labor, of the black population continued after the abolition of slavery. Immediately after the end of the Civil War, most Southern states replaced their Slave Codes with the so-called Black Codes, which were aimed at severely restricting the freedom of former slaves and maintaining them in a state of quasi-slavery through extremely low wages, debt peonage, as well as numerous sweeping vagrancy statutes. Mounting criticism from the Northern States led to a brief interlude during which the federal government tried to turn freed people into citizens and “free” wage laborers with the help of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, better known as the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Freedmen’s Bureau was set up toward the end of the Civil War in March 1865 to provide immediate relief to freed people as well as to poor whites uprooted by the war, but its mission expanded to a large-scale and often contradictory effort to protect freed people’s civil and political rights, to revive agricultural production in the South, and to turn former slaves into free wage laborers (often on the same plantations they used to work on as slaves) (Goldberg 2007). The Freedmen’s Bureau can be understood as an early, although ultimately failed, attempt to (unevenly) integrate African Americans into a Northern capitalist order as both citizens and self-dependent but docile wage laborers. Despite its checkered track record, the Freedmen’s Bureau started from the assumption that African Americans could be turned into self-dependent citizens and workers. This is perhaps why Du Bois (2007, 179) praised the Bureau as “the most extraordinary and far-reaching institution of social uplift that America has ever attempted,” despite the fact that it also frequently served as an instrument for disciplining black labor (Goldberg 2007, 40–2). The simple fact that freed people could now enter labor contracts, even if they were extremely harsh and, more often than not, entered into under highly coercive conditions, was a first step toward less expropriatory and more exploitative labor relations. In 1872, Southern white supremacists ultimately succeeded in swaying Congress to terminate the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Black Codes were replaced by the Jim Crow laws in 1877. The Jim Crow laws contained many provisions that were frequently as, if not more, oppressive than the original Black Codes. Besides mandating strict racial segregation and brutally punishing any infraction against whites, Jim Crow laws also ensured African Americans’ continuing availability as an expropriable agricultural labor force

through debt peonage and convict leasing. This brutal colonial regime of racist oppression and expropriation was ultimately backed by both legal and extra-legal violence in the form of lynching (Marable 1983).

A neocolonial “entanglement of capitalist accumulation processes with a racial/ethnic hierarchy” persisted after the abolition of slavery and the end of Jim Crow (Grosfoguel 2003). Although African Americans (as well as other racialized groups who are considered citizens) have struggled for and ultimately won formally equal rights, although there now is a sizable black professional class, and although the United States elected its first black president, racial divisions of labor are still firmly in place. Michael Dawson makes this point forcefully:

Whether as slaves during one epoch; as colonized workers, sharecroppers, workers within segregated/segmented labor markets throughout the twentieth century; or, as disposable workers in this neoliberal era—those marked by race within the United States and elsewhere have been denied a basic feature of capitalism—access to labor markets or, if granted access, the ability to sell their labor on an equal basis.

(Dawson 2016, 150)

Indeed, in socio-economic terms, particularly with regard to their unequal access to labor markets, the racialized poor in the United States still find themselves in a neocolonial situation.

Surveillance plays a key role in securing this neocolonial situation. Practices of surveillance not only grant or deny access to (segmented) labor markets but also facilitate exploitation if access is granted (see Fuchs 2013 for a discussion of capitalist labor force and market surveillance). Even after the abolition of colonial labor control and the extension of formal legal equality, surveillance continues to have a disproportionate impact on the racialized poor. Surely, in a context of formal legal equality, racial difference itself can no longer legitimate the use of intrusive surveillance and authoritarian labor control. However, discourses of criminality and welfare dependence are now mobilized for legitimating the disproportionate surveillance of the racialized poor. In short, racializing surveillance continues to play a key role in reproducing a racial division of labor by either excluding the racialized poor from the labor market through criminal justice sanctions or including them in the lowest rungs of the labor market through welfare-cum-workfare programs.

Neocolonial racialization through welfare surveillance

The rise of the modern administrative state is closely entwined with the development of various techniques for gathering knowledge on “the processes of the population,” many of which were honed and developed in settler colonial and colonial settings (Gordon 1991, 20; see also Foucault 1991; Giddens

1987). Hence, the rise and expansion of state-administered welfare also went hand-in-glove with an extension and intensification of surveillance. The moment the state took on the task of supporting those who were deemed unable to support themselves, people in need had to be identified, their level of need had to be assessed, and, above all, their eligibility had to be ascertained. From the inception of modern state welfare, surveillance served the primary purpose of making a distinction between those eligible for public support and those who must fend for themselves. In the United States, this distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor has always been profoundly racialized. Indeed, welfare has been and continues to be “one of the most racialized of political domains” in the United States (Brown 2013, 395).

The history of modern poor relief is closely tied to questions of social control, on the one hand, and the constitution and maintenance of labor markets, on the other (Polanyi 1957; Dean 1991; Piven Fox and Cloward 1993). In fact, through its emphasis on means-testing and the principle of less eligibility, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in Britain marked the constitution of the first national labor market and was thus key for the expansion of industrial capitalism (Polanyi 1957; Dean 1991). Both the means test and the principle of less eligibility are major drivers of welfare surveillance. The means test hinges on determining who actually needs and deserves poor relief. Today, means-tested welfare refers to programs that are only targeted at particular populations—mainly those whose income is below a certain threshold. There are other forms of welfare, such as insurance-based programs, that potentially benefit a larger portion of the overall population. In the United States, in particular, the very term welfare now denotes primarily means-tested forms of poor relief. We should note that this is wildly inaccurate because the middle classes are still the prime beneficiaries of welfare spending (Ward 2005, 244–7; see also Wacquant 2009). Means testing entails gathering vast amounts of information on those seeking public support in order to determine whether they are eligible. Application forms and interviews with case managers require very detailed information about applicants’ family situation, health, job history, and even sometimes sexual history.

The principle of less eligibility, first formulated by Jeremy Bentham, moreover, stipulates that public relief ought to be less attractive than the most onerous and most badly paid work (see Sieh 1989, 162). Less eligibility is the primary source of welfare stigma. Welfare applicants and recipients are subjected to various rituals of humiliation, which often take the form of intrusive surveillance, including home visits, mandatory drug testing, etc. The main justification for intrusive welfare surveillance is, however, the prevention of welfare fraud. Ironically, welfare fraud is a structural necessity, while its prevalence is massively overstated. A number of studies found that levels of fraud are very similar across different government programs (see Gilliom 2001). Welfare recipients are, thus, as likely—or as unlikely—to cheat as, let’s say, recipients of farm subsidies. Yet welfare recipients are subject to far more

intrusive levels of surveillance than recipients of farm subsidies. It is thus probably fair to say that surveillance is largely used for making welfare less eligible. At the same time, welfare benefits alone are barely sufficient to allow a household to make ends meet. Most welfare recipients, therefore, rely on some sort of unreported income, which means that they are living in constant fear of being found out and of having their benefits cut or even terminated as a result (Gilliom 2001; Wacquant 2009).

Welfare surveillance has been expanded enormously in response to the growth of the welfare state and the extension of relief to minorities, especially African Americans, in the wake of President Johnson's Great Society programs and the successes of the civil rights and welfare rights movements (Gilliom 2001, 26–7; see also Piven Fox and Cloward 1993; Ward 2005). Welfare surveillance is geared toward determining eligibility, preventing fraud, and deterring people from applying. To illustrate some of the surveillance practices that welfare applicants and recipients are subject to, I will use the example of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as part of Clinton's 1996 welfare reform. TANF provides cash benefits and is primarily targeted at poor single mothers. The 1996 welfare reform pretty much abolished welfare as an entitlement. TANF comes with a five-year lifetime limit. Moreover, TANF recipients have to find work within two years of receiving benefits. Thus, TANF is a form of workfare pushing the poor—in this case primarily single mothers—into the lowest rungs of the labor market. At the same time, states and even counties can set even more stringent eligibility criteria and conditionalities than the ones stipulated by the federal government. As a consequence, surveillance practices vary enormously between jurisdictions. TANF consists of a multistage and multiday application process, including interviews, group sessions, and assessments of employability. During this process, applicants have to answer questions regarding needs, psychological well-being, resources, paternity information about children, etc. Moreover, they have to back up their answers with a lot of additional third-party information. All information is electronically stored and compared with federal, state, and commercial databases in order to determine eligibility and identify both fraudulent information and duplicate applications. Some jurisdictions even obtain debit card information to track their recipients' spending habits. Many jurisdictions require fingerprints and photographs. TANF also enforces child support. Thus, if the paternity of children is contested, TANF recipients have to agree to DNA testing. A number of jurisdictions also conduct home visits. And some jurisdictions also mandate drug testing (Gilman 2008). If benefits are awarded, recipients are responsible for keeping their information up to date. Failure to do so may result in sanctions such as cuts to or even cancellation of their benefits.

Welfare surveillance does not affect only people of color, but the massive expansion of welfare surveillance coincided with the extension of poor relief

to people of color. In addition, in public discourse, welfare—often narrowly viewed as encompassing only means-tested programs benefitting the poor—is often closely associated with blackness (Wacquant 2009; Roberts 2014a; see also Roberts 2014b). The replacement of AFDC by TANF is a case in point. As Deborah Ward puts it:

Race and racial distinctions had become so embedded in our welfare state that changes in recipient demographics—perceived or real, justified or not—led to the dismantling of a long-standing system, and this dismantling both reflected and reaffirmed the racial division between the worthy and the unworthy poor.

(Ward 2005, 31)

The abolishment of poverty relief as an entitlement through Clinton's 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA) marked the culmination of a racial backlash to the expansion of relief to poor African Americans. But there could only be a racial backlash because poor relief had always been racialized.

Virginia Eubanks suggests that welfare surveillance constitutes a form of poverty profiling: "Like racial profiling, poverty profiling targets individuals for extra scrutiny based not on their behavior but rather on a personal characteristic: living in poverty" (Eubanks 2018, 158). Yet, in my view, welfare surveillance must be viewed rather as racialized class profiling, whereby class-specific behaviors are classified as deviant so that particular populations can be slated for extra scrutiny and punitiveness without violating the principle of legal formal equality. These behaviors are class specific because they are associated with extreme poverty, but because people of color are disproportionately affected by poverty—especially by its most extreme forms—welfare surveillance also disproportionately targets people of color and thus inevitably intersects with racial profiling.

Eubanks also makes the compelling argument that "[r]elief institutions are machines for undermining the collective power of poor and working-class people, and for producing indifference in everyone else" (Eubanks 2018, 178). Relief institutions indeed serve to pacify poor and working-class people while ensuring their continuing availability for exploitation and expropriation. However, the pacification of the working class is also effected through divisions within the working class, and the very distinction between the poor and the working class is both product and producer of these divisions. Distinctions between the poor and the working class, and between the deserving and undeserving poor, moreover, reinforce racial divisions, because "[t]hroughout welfare state development, *deserving* is a code word for 'white'" (Ward 2005, 241).

Welfare surveillance constitutes a political technology for punitively managing and racializing an economically disposable population. Enforcing less

eligibility through intrusive surveillance ultimately reinforces the stigma attached to means-tested welfare. In its efforts to sniff out even the smallest infraction of the onerous rules of means-tested welfare programs and through its rituals of humiliation, welfare surveillance serves to push welfare applicants into the lowest rungs of the labor market, where their labor power is often not only exploited but also expropriated. The work requirements now attached to welfare programs, such as TANF, facilitate capitalist accumulation through the provision of cheap labor, while the meager financial transfer payments serve to (partially) address some of the social dislocations caused by capitalist accumulation. As a consequence, welfare surveillance produces and reproduces racial divisions and hierarchies within the US working class. Welfare surveillance stigmatizes and ultimately racializes welfare recipients while obscuring the colonial genealogy of racializing state surveillance. Welfare surveillance brings about the hypervisibility of welfare applicants and recipients for the administrative state as well as in public discourse (through media representations), while the neocolonial racializing effects of these surveillance practices remain largely invisible. Furthermore, welfare surveillance renders the individual failings of its targets transparent while obscuring structural inequities that create the demand for public relief in the first place. In short, welfare surveillance has emerged as a central neocolonial technology of racialization in the context of formal legal equality and professed colorblindness.

Conclusion

In capitalist social formations a key function of surveillance-as-social-sorting is to secure the conditions for capitalist accumulation. This occurs through the classifications and ultimate division of those people who comprise the class that produces the value necessary for capitalist accumulation: the working class. Making distinctions between those whose labor can be expropriated, those who are “merely” exploited, and those whose labor is viewed as disposable; more finely grained classifications around the productivity of individual and/or collective units of labor within particular industries or places of production; as well as distinctions between the worthy and the unworthy poor have divided and continue to divide the working class.

In a *settler colonial* and *neocolonial* context, such as the United States, these distinctions are also always both racialized and racializing. Rationalities and practices of racializing surveillance, from chattel slavery to contemporary poverty governance, have thus been central to the reproduction of divisions within the US working class. However, rationalities and practices of racializing surveillance have also changed, particularly in response to various forms of resistance by racialized populations. As a result of the struggles of racialized populations, particularly the civil rights movement,

racializing surveillance now operates in the context of formal legal equality and professed colorblindness, and thus has to obscure both its colonial genealogy and its racializing effects. But, in spite of these highly significant changes, surveillance-as-social-sorting continues to divide the working class in order to extract as much value out of labor as possible as well as to prevent, control, and pacify working-class resistance.

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