

## David Theo Goldberg and Susan Searls Giroux, *Sites of Race* (Polity Press, 2014)\*

David Theo Goldberg has produced a number of ground-breaking, widely-cited works in his career, *The Racial State* (2002) and *The Threat of Race* (2009) being two of the more influential monographs within an expansive corpus. Both texts have produced critical interventions in the field of critical race theory – the former articulating how race is inscribed in the very formation of the modern state, the latter tracing the ways in which the increasing neoliberalisation of political economies and socialities has simultaneously intensified and depoliticised ongoing racial exclusions and oppressions. In placing *Sites of Race* within Goldberg’s oeuvre, it could, in a sense, be considered as an entry-level summation of a number of the key ideas and concepts developed across these two books, and in the rest of Goldberg’s work. Significant theoretical concepts like racial neoliberalism, the racial state, political theologies of race, ‘buried, alive’ racisms, and postracialism figure strongly throughout.

In keeping with Goldberg’s obvious impulse toward publishing his work in innovative, accessible formats that go beyond academic convention (see, for example, his online digital project *Blue Velvet: Re-Dressing New Orleans in Katrina’s wake*), *Sites of Race* presents the aforementioned key ideas and concepts in the format of a dialogue, melding together a number of conversations between Goldberg and literary/critical theorist Susan Searls Giroux between 2006 and 2011. The dialogical format adds much to the book; not only does it make the text more accessible by inviting the reader into a conversation rather than a monologue or interview, it enables Giroux to cue, interject on, challenge and add to Goldberg’s thoughts in a manner befitting a conversation between the two colleagues (and friends).

The conversations between Goldberg and Giroux are curated to fit neatly into themed chapters, which are further broken up into two five-chapter sections. The first five chapters primarily address questions of theory. The first chapter (‘Race to modernity’) sees Goldberg explaining how the imposition of raced hierarchies and exclusions persist within liberal modernity, despite a nominal commitment within to ‘idealised principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity ... as it increasingly insists upon the moral irrelevance of race’ (27). To address this paradox within liberal modernity, Goldberg advances a conceptual reorientation in the second chapter (‘Global racialities’) which he calls ‘racial regionalisation’ – a move away from nation-centric comparativism to a process of mapping the ‘complex of racial arrangements and racist expression’ in their ‘interactive global reach’ (40). Via dialogue between Derrida’s auto-immunity logic<sup>1</sup> and his own logic of self-strangulation, Goldberg illustrates how racial logics of ‘inside and belonging, contrasted with outside and lack’ not only structure raced hierarchies within borders, but also necessarily across them (46).

The third chapter (‘Modernity’s civic religion’) skitters off into hitherto uncharted territory – that of the interlacing of race and ‘modernity’s progressive self-secularisation’ (49). In this chapter, Goldberg argues that race has ‘increasingly configured that which the theological had served to do in political and sociological terms under earlier regimes of conception, order, and arrangement’ (49). This racial configuration assumes the status of an ordained, infallible order, as the ‘strain of non-godly origin comes to underpin assertions of inherent [racial] inferiority’ (51). The fourth chapter (‘Racial states’) explains how these racial

<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,’ in G. Borradori (ed.) *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 85-136.

configurations have been imbricated in the formation of the modern racial state. Goldberg argues, using the absence of the state in Omi and Winant's (2014) work<sup>2</sup> on racial formations as a cue, that race is not epiphenomenal to the formation of the modern state. Instead, he argues that race is a 'structuring condition' of the state; that the 'technologies of population classification, coordination and management' that have characterised state formation in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are and always have been irrevocably 'racially configured' (69-70).

This emphasis on the constitutive role race plays in state formation and reproduction is perhaps the first of the two core theoretical concerns of the book. The second concern is related to the first: that of the impacts of neoliberal reform on the contemporary racial state. Against the common misconception that the neoliberal project is out to diminish the role of the state, Goldberg asserts that the functionalities and priorities of the state have instead been *shifted*. In the context of the contemporary United States, he emphasises two key examples of this: the attack on the caretaker/welfare functions of the state, and the intensification of its securitising and repressive mechanisms:

The attack on the state ... is seen as an attack on the state servicing black folk, as the largest employer of people of colour, as making possible affirmative action, as enabling 'welfare queens', as not being tough on crime or illegal immigration. (76)

Along with these shifts, the individualising drive of neoliberal sensibility attacks the very explicability of race – how can race be 'structured by social arrangement, by predefined state possibilities and impossibilities' if it is a matter of 'personal preferences, as a habit of the heart, as choices individuals make'? (80).

This work on the racial state and racial neoliberalism segues into the fifth chapter ('Fearing Foucault') which includes a lengthy meditation on the influence of Michel Foucault on the development of both concepts, along with the influence of Foucault on other influential race critical theorists like Stuart Hall and Ann Stoler. Some typically forthright responses to what Goldberg perceives as mischaracterisations of his own work and Foucault's by Heiner, and Kyriakides and Torres are included for good measure.<sup>3</sup>

Even for a conversational, dialogical text, the sheer nuance and depth of Goldberg's theory can at times make for dense reading. The second five chapters make a welcome move into purposefully applying these theoretical insights to current issues in American racial politics. Chapter six ('The racilogics of militarising society') sees Goldberg forensically unveiling the racial implications of how the deregulation of economic and financial flows mandated by neoliberalism has been entangled with the increased application of logics of militarised efficiency to social life. In the seventh chapter ('Migrating racisms'), Goldberg traces how race is put to work in shaping migratory flows from South to North, along with the management and moulding of the resulting heterogeneity through multiculturalism in developed societies. Chapter eight ('Civic lessons') foregrounds the rollback of civil rights commitments alongside the neoliberalisation of the American state, with particular focus on the attacks on voting rights, affirmative action, and the expanding rates of black incarceration. In chapter nine ('Racial (ir)relevance'), Goldberg articulates with clarity his conceptualisation of

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<sup>2</sup> See M. Omi and H. Winant *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See B. T. Heiner, 'Foucault and the Black Panthers', *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 11.30 (2007) 313-56; C. Kyriakides, and R. Torres, *Race Defaced: Paradigms of Pessimism, Politics of Possibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.)

‘postracialism’, a condition which involves an ongoing attempt to engage in an ‘erasure of difference and social division predicated on race’, whilst simultaneously reaching for ‘equalising sameness as the baseline for addressing issues of social justice’ (171). Using the horrifyingly scandalous example of Trayvon Martin’s racially-motivated murder at the hands of George Zimmerman, Goldberg outlines a series of mechanisms through which postracialism operates. The tenth and last chapter (‘Reiterating Obama’) sees Goldberg deconstructing the various ways in which the political phenomenon of Obama ‘represents a range of continuities and shifts in American racial life’ (186).

There are two gaps that one could perhaps discern within this book. The first concerns the relative lack of attention given to the ways in which racial neoliberalism facilitates the ongoing suppression of Indigenous sovereignties in settler-colonies like the U.S., and, of course, Australia and Canada. Relatedly, the second is the book’s strong geographical focus on American racial politics (save for an illuminating discussion about racial neoliberalism and formal apartheid in Goldberg’s country of origin, South Africa [73]). These concerns, however, arguably fall outside the scope of the book, and thus must serve as prompts for further research. Indeed, for Goldberg, the primary concern in this work is to articulate together, in an accessible format, the key concepts and ideas with which race critical scholars might articulate the ‘buried, alive’ racisms which operate across different global sites. This much is clear in his concluding remarks:

How do we live together interactively, justly, without race while negotiating worlds produced and stricken by its changing terms and conditions? And how do we negotiate the existing terms of race critically, from differentiated positions of power and privilege structured historically and contemporarily by race, when its terms and effects of articulation have been rendered invisible, buried but alive? (208)

In *Sites of Race*, Goldberg has provided race-critical scholars across the world with some richly generative, incisive theoretical tools. As Nisha Kapoor (2013) has already done in the context of racial neoliberalism and counter-terrorism policy in the United Kingdom,<sup>4</sup> it is up to scholars in the antipodes and beyond to take up these tools and do the work of excavating the ways in which race still structures the very terms on which the axes of privilege/disprivilege, inclusion/exclusion operate.

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<sup>4</sup> N. Kapoor, ‘The advancement of racial neoliberalism in Britain’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36.6 (2013) 1028–46.