Introduction

Twenty years have elapsed since the publication of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, a work that returned to the archives of New World slavery and post-slavery, and countered prevailing understandings of modernity through a focus on "race," transnational intellectuals, and music. Gilroy's projects after *The Black Atlantic* have expanded upon his earlier theorizations of the complex networks of cultural and intellectual exchange he sees at work across black diasporic locales. The post–*Black Atlantic* corpus, as it were, is significant for many reasons, including its more explicit connection to the writings of Frantz Fanon, the intellectual genealogy of "human rights" it identifies and seeks to expand, and its reexamination of metropolitan cultures in which long-standing patterns of race hierarchy have mutated yet continue to figure in ongoing postcolonial predicaments and everyday encounters. *Retrieving the Human: Reading Paul Gilroy* brings historical perspectives to bear on Gilroy's corpus even as it considers the distinctive features of his current projects. Its premise emerged from a lecture given by Gilroy on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2007. Seven scholars from around the country were invited to write and speak on any aspect of Gilroy's oeuvre with which they had become intellectually engaged or by which they had been influenced. Each was asked to use his or her own site of intellectual engagement with Gilroy's writings as a point of departure.

Richard King and Dennis Dworkin, in keeping with their perspectives as historians, undertook critical readings in Gilroy's intellectual biography, examining each of his major works in succession. Their essays appear together, along with that of the postcolonial critic Anthony Alessandrini, in

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part 1, "Theories in Motion: Roots and Routes." In King's case, Gilroy's intellectual roots and routes form the occasion for an essay on the stakes at work in Gilroy's continuously evolving thought. In his essay "Traditions, Genealogies, and Influences: Gilroy's Intellectual Roots and Routes," King considers Gilroy as a thinker whose vision of the "Black Atlantic" and the world stresses shifts, borrowings, and hybridities, and thus he sees the dominant influences on Gilroy's thought as multiple and overlapping from the start. One can easily identify a Western Marxist–Frankfurt approach, King argues, but Gilroy also makes use of an anti-imperialist analysis derived from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and has recently drawn upon aspects of Freudian theory. As King points out, a further tension exists between Gilroy's debts to British cultural studies and the influence of African American thought and culture, between cultural sociology and the history of ideas, between postcolonial and New World orientations. Finally, King maps with nuance a movement in Gilroy's thought between high cultural theories and popular cultural sources. In his contribution to this volume, King explores the various strands of Gilroy's intellectual history, how they interact with one another, and whether one seems to predominate above the others. He makes a convincing case for Gilroy as a thinker who is best described as part of a "diasporic" intellectual tradition that encompasses extraordinary figures. Of the diasporic thinkers pertinent to Gilroy's work, the presence of W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Wright certainly makes itself felt. Even so, among all these thinkers, for King, Gilroy is arguably the most versatile and wide-ranging, for his thought is not to be exclusively identified with the European, African, North American, or Caribbean strands in modern social critique, but in fact navigates routes that transgress their limits.

Dworkin, for his part, demonstrates how Gilroy's sometimes renegade thought pushed at the boundaries of British cultural studies. In chapter 2, "Paul Gilroy and the Pitfalls of British Identity," Dworkin situates Gilroy's recent analysis of contemporary Britain in its intellectual and political setting, emphasizing the entanglement of British intellectual life and Gilroy's work as a critic and intellectual. Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*, written in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, challenges the growing ethnic absolutism and cultural nationalism in contemporary Britain and the West more broadly. Gilroy's critique of contemporary Britain is a potent affirmation and defense of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism at a time when all of these are threatened by essentialist notions of national identity and unbridgeable cultural difference. Yet as Dworkin reminds us, *Postcolonial Melancholia* also builds

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upon Gilroy's earlier engagements with "the Condition of England" question. Dworkin underscores the ways in which Gilroy's more recent work resonates with arguments that Gilroy has been making since he was a graduate student at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Studies in the late 1970s, building on theoretical/political openings found in the Centre's collectively authored *Policing the Crisis* (1978). These arguments have been important to cultural studies; they have simultaneously been significant within discourses of decline and identity in contemporary Britain. Gilroy's concomitant attention to "structure" and "agency," his focus on modes of dominance and resistance, his privileging of history and counterhistory, and his exploration of the politics of representation all suggest vital connections with both British cultural studies and the discourse of decline. Drawing upon and traversing the cultural studies tradition, Gilroy's recent work, Dworkin argues, addresses the political culture of contemporary Britain from distinctive transnational and multicultural perspectives.

Other scholars examine the relationship between Gilroy and his intellectual models. Such is the impetus behind Anthony Alessandrini's essay on the intellectual filiation at work between Gilroy and Frantz Fanon. In chapter 3, "'Enough of This Scandal': Reading Gilroy through Fanon, or Who Comes after Race?" Alessandrini demonstrates the ways in which Gilroy's body of work has made its way along an interesting route in its engagement with humanism—that is, "humanism" both as concept and strategy. One of the more striking transitions from *The Black Atlantic* to *Against Race* and *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Alessandrini points out, is the move from what might be seen as a highly critical but nevertheless sympathetic investigation of the legacies of the Enlightenment in the earlier work to the repeated invocations of "planetary humanism" and "strategic universalism" in his more recent books. This move, Alessandrini argues, is coterminous with Gilroy's increasingly close and complex reading of Frantz Fanon. Fanon was not a key intellectual figure in the genealogy of *The Black Atlantic* that Gilroy set out in his earlier work. By the time of *Against Race*, however, Gilroy introduces Fanon in the early pages of the book as the figure "whose work frames these concerns." Given that Gilroy's double project is simultaneously to expose the complicity of humanist thinking (as well as other aspects of the Enlightenment project) with colonialism, slavery, and racialism, while at the same time working toward a transformed concept of humanism as part of an antiracist and anticolonial political strategy, the link to Fanon, who made a similar sort of call for a "new humanism" almost fifty years ago, is perhaps to be expected, Alessandrini writes. The more interesting point comes out of an examination of

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the ways in which Gilroy draws upon Fanon's work in articulating his vision of planetary humanism even as he distances himself from certain aspects of Fanon's own reformulation of humanism—in particular, what Gilroy refers to (in *Postcolonial Melancholia*) as Fanon's "youthful flirtations with an existentialist understanding of human agency." By contrast, Gilroy's stated goal is to place his "radically nonracial humanism" upon a "more stable foundation than those provided by . . . Fanon's phenomenological, existential, and psychoanalytical interests." So it is instructive to move back to Fanon's complex and agonized engagement with humanism throughout his diverse body of work in order to provide a framework for assessing Gilroy's planetary humanism. When we encounter Gilroy through Fanon, Alessandrini insists, we may be in a better position to appreciate the specific political strategy that is articulated through the notion of planetary humanism, which is to provide revisionist content for antiracist thinking and action. In this sense, the shared strategy of Gilroy and Fanon resonates more than a bit with the project that Michel Foucault referred to as "the critical ontology of ourselves." What the strategic humanisms of Gilroy and Fanon share with Foucault's project, Alessandrini argues, is an orientation toward "the history of the present." In the case of Gilroy and Fanon, the orientation is specifically toward a radically nonracial future, with an awareness that this future will only come through the sort of antiracist acts that their own notions of humanism are intended to frame and enable. Gilroy's "radically nonracial humanism," in other words, must not be seen as a case of wishful thinking but rather as a strategy for nurturing a nonracial future, not by declaring us "beyond race" but precisely by the urgency of antiracist thinking and action as the starting point for contemporary criticism.

Paul Gilroy's essay along with Jonathan Boyarin's response to it together constitute the second part of the book, "Retrieving the Human: Two Scholars in Dialogue." Central to this particular dialogue, Gilroy's "Multiculturalism and the Negative Dialectics of Conviviality" also serves as the volume's touchstone, for all of the writers respond to its thought in some way. In it, Gilroy addresses a range of subjects, including the currency of human rights discourse, the problem of the undoing of postcolonial approaches in the humanities, and recent theoretical reassessments of the concentration camp as a modern form. As he engages the work of such writers as Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, Hannah Arendt, and Primo Levi, Gilroy considers the evasion of histories of racism and racial hierarchies within debates about human rights and multiculturalism. For Gilroy, the current critical dialogue on human rights and multiculturalism drowns out histories of racism through

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"esoteric academic specialisms," effectively rendering illegitimate any commentary that would "de-nature race." His answer to this particular intellectual moment is an antiracist pedagogy that revives rather than circumvents the idea of the "human," and thereby reworks the genealogy of human rights by attending to histories of racial hierarchy and colonial statecraft. Gilroy closes his intervention in contemporary debates by returning to African American critical thought, an area of scholarly inquiry within which he has long held an important place. He summons the words of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and others to indicate an alternative account of the emergence of "human rights"—an account that seeks to restore the possibilities of critical humanism in what he calls our "age of rendition."

Jonathan Boyarin, a scholar of religion, engages Gilroy on this very topic, and his essay includes a compelling and direct (at times a point-by-point) response to "Multiculturalism and the Negative Dialectics of Conviviality." In chapter 5, "For a Dialogue with Paul Gilroy," Boyarin contends that Gilroy's essay may be read as a manifesto for rights in the name of a humanity that is shared but not bare. For Boyarin, Gilroy seeks to articulate a notion of that humanity as freed from the reified hierarchies of a racism forged in the adventure of colonialism abroad and genocide in the European cosmopole but still constituted within human history rather than merely posited in terms derived from Aristotelian analytics. The project is extraordinarily ambitious and is by all means one to be cheered and fostered, Boyarin allows. Perhaps like any manifesto, however, it implicitly holds certain truths to be self-evident. In his response, Boyarin points to several moments in the essay where such givens appear to limit the rhetorical force of Gilroy's argument in its current iteration and where further interrogation in the spirit of an antiracist, critical humanism promises to make multiculture and the negative dialectics of conviviality even more powerful resources within Gilroy's future-oriented criticism.

Part 3 of the collection, "Debating the Human in Everyday Spaces," includes three essays and an interview with Gilroy. The essays by Ranu Samantrai, Jay Garcia, and Tavia Nyong'o present alternative conceptualizations and critical rereadings of Gilroy's work. In chapter 6, "Sedentary and Mobile Poetics: Paul Gilroy and the Aesthetics of Postcolonial Theory," Samantrai takes Paul Gilroy's broadly noted celebration of mobility as an instance of postcolonial theory's debt to modernism—to the great modern thinkers certainly, especially among them Marx, but also to the icon of the city in modernist aesthetics. As is well known, English cities have been transformed since the mid–twentieth century by the migrations of peoples from former colonies.

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But if urban settings are celebrated as shifting sites replete with political potential, in the popular imagination the national essence has retreated to the haven of the countryside. Always dependent on the aestheticization of land and people, English racial discourse is currently drawing again on the rural aesthetic to represent the nation as an organic and threatened geobody. But, preoccupied with the icon of the city as the setting for the innovations of cosmopolitan, hybrid cultures, postcolonial theorists leave undisturbed the reenchantment of the countryside as the privileged repository of Englishness, according to Samantrai. She situates Gilroy's urban aesthetic against the push of English racial discourse and the pull of the modern city, arguing that Gilroy's reliance on the urban as the necessary setting of the Marxist account of historical change limits our understanding of contemporary racial discourse. Importantly, however, Gilroy does not leave this question unaddressed, for he takes it up in his discussion of the images that figure prominently in *Black Britain*, a work described in the interview with Gilroy that concludes the present book.

Jay Garcia's "Dynamic Nominalism in Alain Locke and Paul Gilroy" examines complementary arguments and critical strategies in the work of Gilroy and that of the African American intellectual Alain Locke. Locke's criticism, centrally invested in the historicizing of racial ideology and alert to the authoritarian potential of all forms of race thinking, in many ways prefigures the arguments against "race" and racism that emerge in Gilroy's work, which has long been known to begin with the refusal of absolutist thinking in the analysis of racial ideology and of racial formation. According to Garcia, investigating Gilroy's arguments in relation to Locke's early-to-mid–twentieth century writings brings to the fore the common concerns and remarkably congruent lines of inquiry pursued by both critics. He concentrates on how Gilroy's recent cultural inquiry reprises and reworks Locke's prior efforts in three key ways. First, Gilroy presses the analysis of "race" even more dramatically than in his earlier work into the domain of the political, much as Locke's work set out to rid "race" of apolitical or prepolitical valences. Second, Gilroy's claims on behalf of the anticolonial humanism of the Second World War and postwar eras converge with Locke's own writings from those periods. And third, Gilroy's insistence on approaching racial hierarchy and ideology through a paradigm of dynamic nominalism recalls Locke's complex use of "race" in his advocacy of "culture-citizenship." Gilroy has increasingly distanced himself from paradigms organized primarily around US race politics and has veered away from W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness," in particular, as a valuable contemporary critical

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lens. At the same time, he continues to focus upon black American letters throughout his work. Garcia shows how Gilroy's intellectual affinities with Locke provide an indispensable critical purchase on his recent interventions.

In "Black Humanitarianism," Tavia Nyong'o turns to Gilroy's treatment of black involvement in the celebrity-humanitarian complex in *Against Race* (2000) and addresses Gilroy's subsequent call, in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), to reshape mainstream debates over "human rights" by harnessing the analytical import of historical struggles of black peoples over "the right to be human." Considering Gilroy's transcoding of Hannah Arendt's conception of a "right to have rights," the essay tracks an itinerary of "race" and the human through subsequent commentators on Arendt, including Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière. It then turns from this post-Enlightenment philosophical trajectory to weigh, as Gilroy has encouraged scholars to do, the self-fashioning agencies of black popular culture as a counter-culture to modernity. In particular it considers the musical legacy of The Fugees, a Haitian, Haitian American, and African American hip hop band, in terms of how the figure of the refugee, as Agamben and Arendt both argue, radically transfigures the ideal-type of citizen, releasing its contained liberatory energies. Employing both musical and visual analysis, the essay argues for moments of internal tension in the contemporary humanitarian appeal—centering on the relief effort in the wake of the 2010 Haitian earthquake—moments that deconstruct the seemingly smooth assimilation of black star power into the celebrity-humanitarian complex. Reversing dominant critical practice, Nyong'o's argument proceeds by unveiling a deep genealogical link between blackness and light: the icon of the halo. The troping of blackness, black people, and Africa as haloed—that is, as shrouded in uncreated light—is irreducible to the seeming analogues of the Enlightenment or racial whitening. Rather, as Nyong'o points out, the halo, and the associated phenomenon of spiritual or secular "glorying," illuminates a central problem for black humanitarianism: does it achieve the goals of a "planetary humanism" that Gilroy has called for? Or does it consolidate the huge gulfs in wealth, well-being, and power that have been celebrity's historical occasion?

The interview transcribed here—"A Dialogue on the Human: An Interview with Paul Gilroy"—was moderated by Rebecka Rutledge Fisher in January 2007, and included questions posed by graduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, whose incisive questions regarding race, gender, religion, music, conviviality, and the post-9/11 "War on Terror" provided Gilroy ground upon which to further illuminate features of his work. The book's final essay, an afterword written

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by John McGowan, responds to pivotal issues raised by the contributors. The refusal to elide racial hierarchies and the history of empire marks all of the component parts of *Retrieving the Human: Reading Paul Gilroy.* The collection also attends to what Richard Wright called "a sense of the inexpressibly human." Yet rather than attempt to fill that category with self-evident content, we instead offer Gilroy's work and several responses to that work as opportunities to return to the "human" and "human rights" in particular in the current conjuncture. Our premise is that such opportunities are necessary and benefit from rethinking from within the black critical tradition. As a recurrent and ever more complex project in the excavation and reworking of that tradition, Gilroy's work represents one of the major critical contributions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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