

# Contending with the Unthought: Notes on the institution of psychology's condition of possibility

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*Abstract: This paper brings into view how the archive that engages antiblackness in the institution of psychology symptomatically displays a weighting and emphasis on the performance of psychology as antiblack rather than an elaboration of an analysis that positions antiblackness as essential and foundational to the existence and coherence of the institution of psychology. On this score, this paper argues how the former is not an adequate analysis from which to think the elaboration of the ethical assessment of psychology as a sociopolitical polity because not only is it impossible given how the field's condition of possibility is constructed by and elaborated from the notion that Blackness is the abnormality that structures all of normality, but also, is ultimately encumbered by an emancipatory horizon that coheres to a neoliberal discourse to be more diverse, inclusive, critical, and multiculturally sensitive, without such intellectual protocols being held accountable to grammars of suffering. Thus, an ethical assessment of the existence of the institution of psychology in a way that is in excess to its performance has been largely uninterrogated. In order to offer an unflinching analysis of crisis to apprehend how the existence of the field of psychology cannot be reconciled with the Slave, this paper interrogates the assumptive logics of the discourse related to reforming the institution of psychology and argues how an emphasis on improving the moral fiber of its performance obscures, rather than clarifies, a more devastating reality and precludes, rather than engages, an assessment of the ethicality of the field of psychology's existence. By refusing to provide a strategy for recourse for "what psychology needs to do" to improve itself, this paper interrogates such redemptive assumptions such as "how psychology and psychologists can lead efforts of reconciliation, repair, and healing" that fundamentally obfuscate an ability to think of enslavement comprehensively (i.e., as an irreconcilable antagonism that has no strategy for recourse), and instead engages the reader with the reality that a set of new and difficult questions may emerge at the site of an ethical assessment of the existence of the institution of psychology that exceed any possibility for reform, reconcilability, and/or redemption in the face of the Slave.*

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## An Explanatory Lens of Interpretation for Introduction: The State of the Black

"There is a difference between a language for liberation and a desire for it" – Jared Sexton

Enslavement and its afterlife have manufactured a World that is parasitic on the Slave/Black, whereby the "World-making permanence of antiblackness" (Sexton, 2019, n.p.) rules that the Slave cannot be in the World yet is foundationally essential to maintaining its coherence. Because of this parasitic contradistinction, not only does antiblackness fundamentally shape the World's sociopolitical organization (Mills, 1997), it also irreconcilably

constructed a World wherein the Human and its constituent categories (e.g., psychological health, normality) necessitate their counterpart, the Black, against which to distinguish themselves (Harrison, 2021; Wilderson, 2020). As Toni Morrison (1993) describes, “nothing [highlights] freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery” (p. 38). The Black is evicted from Human subjectivity to the status of an object of nonrelationality in its structural, paradigmatic position of absolute dereliction as one who is always already socially dead (Patterson, 1982). The Black’s paradigmatic position of violence known as social death is “generally dishonored, perpetually open to gratuitous violence, and void of kinship structure, that is, having no relations that need be recognized, a being outside of relationality” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 11). The reason the violence of social death is considered gratuitous is because it bends away from a sort of contingent and knowable logic. Read from this angle, gratuitous violence is *illogical* – it is not contingent upon a transgressive act of legality.

For all the other groups of people there is a certain contingency that interrupts, as well as makes legible, the violence of the state. These people must transgress, or be perceived to transgress the Law before the anvil of state violence falls on their heads. For the Blacks, the Slaves, no notion of transgression is necessary. The pleasure of maiming Black bodies is its own reward (Wilderson, 2020, p. 209).

There is no logic to the gratuitous nature of social death beyond the psychic stability that having a “Slave in the mind” provides the genomic structure of the World’s psyche; nonblack people know that they are Human because there is an ensemble of sentient beings that are permanently barred from civil society and accessing human capacity<sup>[1]</sup> through the ritually re-enacted practices of antiblack violence that exceeds a subjectivity to contingent, transgressive acts. To know that the violence that subjugates or positions nonblacks is always contingent upon a transgressive act – compared to the type of gratuitous violence that is *not* contingent upon a transgressive act and cannot be turned into an event – provides what contradistinguishes the Human from Slave. Antiblack violence sustains the World as an antagonism that cannot be redressed because of its foundational semiotic and ontological function to Human Life. The Slave who is positioned by gratuitous violence provides *absolute* coherence to the concept of Human by being its absolute opposite. In this way, compared to subaltern conflicts that are structured by *contingent* violence – an “intra-Human discussion” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 89) whereby, through struggle, one can “become” Human – social death is an essential antagonism required for the stability of the World.

With the above theoretical backdrop briefly sketched, I abbreviate the main objectives of the present study as follows: (1) to bring into view that a focus on the *performance* of the field of psychology is inadequate if one were to think about the ethicality of the institution and field of psychology’s *existence* in relation to the Slave and (2) to interrogate how reforms to the field of psychology obscure, rather than clarify, its ethical assessment as they ultimately suffer from the assumption that psychology is an ethical sociopolitical polity to all beings *universally*. Thus, a set of new and difficult questions may emerge at the site of the ethical assessment of the institution of psychology’s right to exist. By contending with the preconditions of ethicality in an antiblack world, the paper is organized as follows. The first section of this paper, “Section I: The institution of psychology and the necessity of the Black,” argues how the Slave gives the field of psychology its condition of possibility whereby without the ability to contradistinguish the Slave as the antithesis to “psychological health” and “normality,” these categories become unintelligible and lose their coherent meaning. Following this definitional move that the very existence of the field of psychology relies on the Slave (i.e., regardless of how “critical” and reformed the field becomes, there is no way for existence to be defined outside of the tentacles of antiblackness), “Section II: The institution of

psychology and the ethical dilemma of the Slave” unfolds how the assumption that the field of psychology can be reconcilable with Blackness if it is improved not only forces Blackness to undergo a type of paradigmatic adjustment whereby fundamental aspects of the violence that position the Slave must therefore be disavowed, but also, circumscribes the emancipatory horizon that Blackness requires to the confines of a reform of its *performance* that neglects to contend with the ethical dilemma the Slave poses upon the *existence* of the institution of psychology. In this way, this imposition on thinking perpetuates a sustained “acceptance” of the legitimacy of psychology as a sociopolitical polity and the field’s inability to think of itself as an unethical formation.

## **Section I: The Institution of Psychology and the Necessity of the Black**

This section outlines how the Slave is required as the field of psychology’s condition of possibility whereby the bedrock grounding wire of the Slave is foundational to the very *study* of the psyche and of the elaboration on a consensus of categories of “psychological health” to be coherent. In other words, the psychological *unhealth* of the Slave must exist in the World in order for a community of psychologically healthy Humans to exist. I would be remiss to neglect the reportage accounting for the performances of the field of psychology’s antiblackness that has been widely documented and importantly expository to archive the ways the field has been performed violently. In sharp contrast, this paper attempts to write against the conventional ways in which the critiques of the field have focused on its performance, and instead argues that the proliferation of such gestures has been inessential to an ethical assessment of the existence of psychology as a sociopolitical formation from the position of the Slave. While a synopsis of the performances of the field of psychology as being antiblack is ultimately unproductive to the paper’s interrogation of the ways that an analysis of the field’s performances forecloses the emancipatory horizon of an ethical assessment of its existence, a brief digression will be made to elaborate upon what I mean by “performance” through both diachronic and synchronic analyses.

## **Diachronic and Synchronic Analyses of the Antiblack Performance of Psychology**

Evan Auguste and colleagues (2022) outline the ways in which the field of psychology has contributed to antiblackness’ insidious permeation of research, criminal justice, and mental health in the United States across time. The authors’ analysis of the ways in which psychology has performed as an antiblack institution accentuates how contemporary manifestations of the pathologization of Blackness materializes in various institutional disciplinary practices that maintain the field’s historical violence, whereby diachronically, the institution of psychology continues to justify the enslavement and political repression of Black people (Metzl, 2010). For example, the methodologically flawed 1840 census suggested that the rate of Black madness was higher in the free states than it was in the slaveholding states in order to insist that freedom caused Black people to become mad, and that enslavement was necessary to promote mental soundness, or so goes the story. Whether through the creation of “drapetomania,” what Samuel Cartwright termed as a form of mania that manifested as an enslaved person’s uncontrollable desire to run away from their white master, or through schizophrenia to pathologize Black protest movements and Black political leaders (Metzl, 2010), Auguste and colleagues (2022) put their finger on the ways antiblackness has been instructive to pathologize Blackness as the

“development and application of psychological diagnoses for centuries” (p. 7). A historical analysis of the institution of psychology reveals Blackness as disorder and the need to pathologize the Black being as the antithesis to “psychological health” and its constituent capacities as a way to justify enslavement.

A synchronic analysis of the necessary disciplining of Blackness corroborates the above diachronic analysis. The ideology of Blackness as both an outsider who is intruding and an insider who has broken social rules of engagement – positioning the Black as both extrusively and intrusively socially dead (Patterson, 1982) – materializes from educational spaces’ criminalization of Black students’ behavior (Government Accountability Office, 2018), to the public’s support for police use of force against Black people with mental illnesses compared to their white counterparts (Kahn et al., 2017), and even further by way of fashioning what constitutes “deviance” to more efficiently characterize the presentation of Blackness (Metzl, 2010). That is to say, the type of thought required to rip a child from their mother’s arms to be carried to the top of an auction block – a type of captivity that is an impasse into existence wherein as David Marriott (2022) puts it, “the breath/that you don't own/is not yours/to breathe” (p. 103) – is the same thought that has imbued itself across time and space by creating the rules of engagement through which psychology as a sociopolitical polity operates. That is, the ocean of violence that this kind of thought that is characterized by categorizing and labeling – thought that is imbued within the field of psychology, but has been written off as “helping” in the same ways that enslavement was written off in that it “helps the Slave” – animates what Dorothy Roberts (2022) refers to as the “giant state machine with the power to destroy [the Black] family” (n.p.).

The institution of psychology’s capacity to determine *who* receives *what* – or what Fernando (2017) articulates as the institutional and interpersonal power psychology wields to “[label] people in terms of their social functioning, capacity to be responsible for their behaviour, personality and mental states—in particular the propensity to be dangerous to, or a burden on, others” (p. 20) – is performed in ways that reflect societal beliefs of Black inferiority, Black danger, and the Black as an object to be disciplined. In this way, how providers of public health and mental health care fundamentally understand and engage with care-seekers is structured by antiblackness. Gambino (2008) highlights how racial stereotypes shape clinicians’ perceptions of Black patients, and “in many instances, physicians were merely re-articulating common stereotypes in a new language” (p. 403). Consequently, a focus on how antiblackness is embedded in the misdiagnosis of Black people (see Frye, 2022; Metzl, 2010) has articulated the dire consequences on the life chances of Black people because the link between the mental health industrial complex and the prison industrial complex (Isaacs, 2014; King, 2014; Sethi & Graziani, 2016) serves to support the state’s predication upon the containment of Black people (Saisi, 2021). In other words, providing an analysis of the performance of psychology as a sociopolitical institution, both diachronically and synchronically, reveals its ritualistic commitment to the policing of Blackness: the organic existence of the institution of psychology is a death sentence for Black people both across time and at a unitary point in time.

On this score, we must go deeper and further than reporting evidence of the sustained commitment to its antiblack performance to understand how the field of psychology’s ritual of violence is foundationally required for the creation of “psychological health.” Despite the fact that the archive of literature documenting critiques of psychology’s antiblackness conventionally focuses on the level of its performance as a sociopolitical polity, this is not an adequate level of analysis to think through an antagonism that cannot be reconciled without forcing such an antagonism to undergo a type of structural adjustment so that it *looks like* it can be reduced to a problem with

a solvable solution, or what Wilderson (2010) refers to as the ruse of analogy. Structurally adjusting the irreconcilability of the essential antagonism of social death – the essential inaugural moment to the production of “World” and “Human” – to a paradigm of violence with a possibility of recourse constrains our thinking of enslavement by disavowing important aspects of our understanding of the paradigmatic position of the Slave. That is, the paradigm of violence that subjugates and positions the Human – contingent violence – cannot be analogized with the gratuitous violence of social death because for contingent violence to exist, there must be an ensemble of beings for which violence comes to them gratuitously. This ruse of analogy, I contend, is the trap to which a weighting and emphasis on the performances of psychology as a sociopolitical polity leads us through negating an intellectual protocol that is held accountable by grammars of suffering (i.e., gratuitous violence that positions the Slave and contingent violence that positions every other sentient being). If the analysis of the field of psychology stops at its performance whereby the emancipatory horizon is its improvement or *rapprochement*, as it were, this death sentence will not be engaged at a level of its essential antagonism – the existence of the institution of psychology altogether. In other words, a level of analysis that is empathic to the Slave without needing to adjust to the false consolatory assumptions of reconciliation – the crisis that emerges when the field of psychology is confronted with the Slave in relation to the existence of the field itself – is an abandoned site of inquiry.

## The Black as Psychology’s Condition of Possibility

In sharp contrast to an analysis of the field of psychology’s performances as antiblack that cannot conceive of providing an elaboration of an analysis of crisis that positions its *existence* as antiblack, what this paper attempts to thread the needle through is that while reportage of how the field of psychology has been violently antiblack is important, it continues to leave available the assumption that psychology can become an ethical sociopolitical polity in relation to the Slave if its performance is improved. In other words, this paper intervenes on the tendency to get captured by the hydraulics of an investigation on the improvement of the field of psychology’s performance in order to argue that this type of investigation is inessential if we are to take the existence of the institution of psychology to task from a lens of ethical assessment. Our point of departure sets its course to bring into view how “psychological health” cannot be elaborated without the psychological unhealth of the Slave – that is, antiblackness is foundational to the field’s institutional and intellectual integrity and coherence.

To set our stage, as a project set to define European thinking and the Human condition, the Enlightenment needed to know what European thinking and the Human condition *were not*. In other words, the Enlightenment and its philosophies had been formally employed by a sociopolitical zeitgeist of articulating European cultural and racial superiority. Guided by its tenets of “reason” and “truth,” Enlightenment was a racialized project aimed to position Black minds as “exteriority, non-self-determining and nonrational” (Warren, 2018, p. 123) that must be disciplined. These notions of Black inferiority and *objectness* were what needed to serve as the grounding wire through which the elaboration of the Human *subjectness* could be derived. As such, such claims were carefully backed by empiricism as Enlightenment philosophers railed the notion that “Human essence was in the body,” values that were captured throughout both literary and political worlds as ideals toward which Western-Anglo thought and behavior should aspire. Articulating European supremacy required the pathologization of Blackness to “prove” the distinction between capacities of the Human and nonhuman, qua Jackson (2013).<sup>[2]</sup> For example, Bean (1906) argued that the Black has well-developed “lower mental faculties” (e.g., smell, sight,

handcraftsmanship, body-sense, melody) whereas the white has well-developed “higher mental faculties” (e.g., self-control, will-power, ethical sense, reason). Just as it is the Black’s *objectness* that gives nonblacks their *subjectness*, it is the Black “lower mental faculty” or the Black *incapacity* for “higher mental faculty” that makes the notion of “mental faculty” writ large, *make sense*.

To put a finer point on it, the field of psychology derives its conception of psychological health from the study of “madness” defined by the racially stratified Enlightenment categories of rationality and establish power over that which is determined “mad” from its position of authority as a form of policing whereby Blackness as madness, therefore, becomes synonymous with subordination. Not only did a racially stratified understanding of the psyche imbue itself into the study of the psyche during the Enlightenment era – that the notion that Human capacity is coherent through Black *incapacity* – this imbued understanding *never disappeared* from the field of psychology. The lasting reverberations from Enlightenment’s project polices how Human is not a universal capacity and maintains the “tear in the World” (Brand, 2002, p. 5) that divides the unbridgeable crevice between sentient beings with subjectivity and sentient beings who are nonsubjects. As a case in point that connects the grounding wire through which psychological health is contrived, Bailey and Mobley (2019) argue that “Blackness has been used to mark disability, while disability has inherently “Blackened” those perceived as unfit” (p. 24). In fewer words, the Slave is the psychological *unhealth* that structures all psychological health.

Both diachronic and synchronic analyses reveal that the Black provides the field of psychology a grounding wire and point of destination for the aggressivity of the discipline; whether you slice it across time or at a unitary cross-section of time, both diachronic and synchronic analyses tumefy the institution of psychology’s agenda to legitimize the status of the Black through discipline and control and to know where to demarcate what constitutes “psychological health” requires antiblackness *in order to make sense*. “What is/not mental functioning” and “what is/not illness of the mind and Human behavior” are not only predicated on the containment and disciplining of Blackness, but also, Blackness must exist as a touchstone of coherence to provide contradistinction for the basis from which categories such as “abnormal,” “unfit,” “psychological unhealth” are contrived. This type of psychic balm and stability that the Black provides the World is the institution of psychology’s *condition of possibility*.

The point I am trying to make is simply this: because Humanness is nonblackness, that which is “psychologically *unhealthy*” is always already Blackened. As Orlando Patterson (1982) argued in *Slavery and Social Death*, this nether world of social death *must* exist in the World for the stability and psychic necessity that knowing that somewhere out there, a noncommunity of nonbeings exists outside of the World of Humanness. To put it somewhat anecdotally, in 1857 as Justice Roger Taney declared the Native to be *the lowest form of Human but can be resuscitated if we train them better*, he simultaneously sent Dred Scott back to enslavement because the lower courts heard a case of someone who had *no standing* in subjectivity or jurisprudence – a being who is positioned *outside* of Humanity. Thus, the only way for that nether-existence to be fundamentally *true* is through the Slave’s Blackened position of nonhumanity that brings the creation of the idea of psychological health into view. That is, as the grounding wire from which the ritualistic violence of antiblackness can be contrived, the Slave is needed to be always already evicted from psychological health.

Thinking of the field of psychology's condition of possibility as *the Black* liberates oneself from the hydraulics of focusing on the field's performances whereby the emancipatory trajectory of this type of thinking is bounded by a besetting hobble that erroneously assumes that the field of psychology is reconcilable with the Slave if its performance is improved. On this score, "reform" and "improvement" are dilapidated terms to think about the Slave in relation to psychology as a sociopolitical polity because the Slave, as the condition of possibility for the field, does not take issue with aspects of the field's performance, but the existence of psychology writ large. By screwing our heads on backwards to think about the institution of psychology's condition of possibility as the Slave (compared to how the conventional archive views the antiblackness of the field from a level of its performance), the removal of drapetomania or the inclusion of radical, critical, and liberation psychologies are mere blips on the screen – types of *experiential moments* and not a *paradigmatic moment*. The technologies of the institution of psychology's condition of possibility being antiblackness simply morphs.

The theoretical shift away from providing reportage of the field of psychology's performances intervenes in the thinking that grounds the archive of critiques and discursive gestures of "how to engage with psychology's antiblackness" that disassemble an analysis empathic to the structural position of the Slave. Once again, the discursive gestures that communicate a report on the ways in which the field of psychology has been performed as violently antiblack hijacks and ratchets down an analysis of ethical assessment of the field of psychology's existence and returns us to a dangerously hobbled endpoint of the improvement of its performance that prescribe the equivalent of anti-bias training to the police. This clouds the reality of psychology as a sociopolitical polity wherein irrespective of and prior to how the field performs, its genome and *existence* are continually made and remade through an antiblack condition of possibility – an ongoingness of enslavement as a relational dynamic, not a historical moment – that has no strategy for recourse. Put more poignantly, because Blackness is required to be the grounds to understand what social and mental functioning and behavior *is not*, undoing antiblackness would *necessarily* undo the institution of psychology.

## Section II: The Institution of Psychology and the Ethical Dilemma of the Slave

To provide an analysis of crisis empathic to the ethical dilemma the figure of the Slave poses upon the edifice of the institution of psychology, this section insists on an intellectual protocol that is held accountable to grammars of suffering. Building from the theoretical interventions Section I provides to argue that the Black is the institution of psychology's condition of possibility whereby undoing antiblackness would undo the institution itself, this section argues that the assumption that the field of psychology can be reconcilable with Blackness if it is improved not only forces Blackness to undergo a type of paradigmatic adjustment whereby fundamental aspects of it must therefore be disavowed, but also, circumscribes the emancipatory horizon that Blackness requires to the confines of a reform of its *performance* and neglects to contend with the ethical dilemma the Slave poses upon the *existence* of psychology as a sociopolitical polity. To cut to the chase, thinking from the unthought position of the Slave's ethical dilemma raises the stakes of analysis to ratchet up thinking about the *performances* of the field of psychology and their improvement to a level of analysis that interrogates its *existence* because it is held accountable to the grammars of suffering that position the Slave as irreconcilable with the existence of the field of psychology altogether, a level of paradigmatic analysis that remains abandoned in the wake of enslavement.

Efforts to reform, improve, and sanitize the institution of psychology can be understood by Kilgore's (2014) term "carceral humanism." Carceral humanism, a term coined by Kilgore (2014), has been deployed to understand how the carceral state expands by creating "kinder" spaces of punishment and containment. Building upon this, Saisi (2021) extends this notion to the carceral space of the institutionalization of mental health. Herein, Saisi (2021) not only conceptualizes the mental health industrial complex as the prison industrial complex in its performance of carceral logics of policing, but also articulates how "liberal reformist ideals of creating spaces better suited to 'treat' people in mental distress...participates in expanding carceral spaces under the auspices of benevolent psychiatric care" (p. 223). Through Saisi's (2021) description of the collusion between the field of psychology and the penal system, the sanitization of psychology as a sociopolitical polity is not only putting lipstick on a pig, it threatens to re-brandish antiblackness in a new label that is cosmetically "multiculturally mindful." In relation to the current paper, such efforts of carceral humanism erroneously assume that through these reform efforts, the field of psychology's practice can be reconciled with the figure of the Slave. In other words, at its base, the metanarratives of reform and improvement of the field erroneously force the figure of the Slave to be reconcilable with the existence of psychology as a sociopolitical formation.

To put this anecdotally, a contributor to the recently revised DSM-5 TR acknowledged how "one of the reasons Blacks are misdiagnosed with schizophrenia is because people don't follow the manual but let their biases and projections influence diagnosis" (Morgan, 2022, n.p.). This subtext posits the existence of the institution of psychology as "neutral," whereby it can be used for harm or help, depending on the practitioner. While this statement makes acknowledgments of antiblackness pertaining to the *performance* of the field of psychology by way of clinician biases, this charge divorces antiblackness from the genomic structure of its conceptualization, which encumbers the ethical assessment of its existence in a way that is accountable to structural positionality. Such an assertion assumes that the problems identified are merely performative, whereby the aspirational horizon is circumscribed by providing a "proper diagnosis," instead of interrogating whether ideas such as "psychological unhealth" or "abnormality" have a right to exist. Providing this example connects to the larger conversation of an analysis of the problem (e.g., antiblackness in psychology) that suffers from looking at the performances of psychology, whereby one cannot look beyond these events of "misdiagnosis" as a performative issue – an issue of malpractice. Such an analysis is speciously buttressed by the assumption that "if the field's performance is improved, it will reach a rapprochement," however, such a claim is bankrupt in the face of the Slave – the field's very condition of possibility. From this angle, the assumption that the improvement of the performance of the field will result in its mythical arrival as an ethical sociopolitical polity collapses what the field represents to the Human with what it represents to the Slave. Where the field's improvement holds a possibility for the Human for whom redemption is a possibility, however, for beings for whom the gratuitous violence is essential to the coherence of the field, there is no possibility for redemption, as discussed paragraphs above – there is no resolution to the type of violence that can never go into remission because of its ritualistic necessity. That is, this kind of intellectual protocol of redress is not held accountable to grammars of suffering that position the Slave and the Human because antiblackness does not and cannot go into remission when Black bodies agree to the terms of submission.

Ratcheting down the ethical dilemma the Slave poses to the existence of the field of psychology to a matter that sentimentally asserts that the field's antiblackness is disconnected from its genomic architecture but is instead performative, whereby the solution-oriented reforms and weighting and emphasis on its performance, ultimately

assumes the Slave can be reconcilable with psychology as a sociopolitical polity. This false consolatory type of thinking jettisons a comprehensive understanding of enslavement as a paradigmatic, relational dynamic between the Slave and all other beings known as Human as opposed to an experiential, historical event: the Slave is therein analogized to *look like* the Human whereby a strategy for recourse and resolve is possible and the stakes that the ethical dilemma of the Slave poses is ratcheted down to a manageable scale of abstraction. Whether through “multiculturally mindful care,” the representation of more Black psychologists, aspiring toward “levelling out racial disparities” in misdiagnosis, the charge of such improvements of psychology as a field focus on the effects of antiblackness in relation to its performance, rather than how antiblackness is the *structuring modality* of and condition of possibility upon which the epistemic and axiomatic ideologies that psychology as a sociopolitical polity are built. No matter how “humane,” “anti-racist,” “unbiased” police officers and the institution of policing becomes (albeit, an oxymoron), its existence remains unethical. (What essential difference does a “multiculturally mindful” prison staff make to the existence of the paradigm of carcerality?) In a similar fashion, as an arm of the state, or as Fanon (2020) refers to the institution of psychology as an “auxiliary to the police” (p. 517), Fanon may have asked, “what *essential* (i.e., at the level of paradigmatic structure) difference exists between the field of psychology, the police, and enslavement for what they represent and enforce to the Black imago?” The type of a-theoretical thinking that forces the Slave to structurally adjust its position to be reconcilable with the edifice of the existence of psychology as a sociopolitical polity constrains an emancipatory horizon to the besetting hobble of the improvement of the field. Having glossed things in this way, the field of psychology’s inability to think of itself as unethical is not as far-fetched as one may have thought. As Justice Taney lucidly tells us, there is no standing for the Slave within the eyes of the law or the eyes of ethics. A robust assertion of the field of psychology’s ethicality *is*, in point of fact, that the Slave be permanently open to the field’s violence as its condition of possibility. Without the type of stability that the Slave provides the field of psychology, it would come apart.

On this score, the level to which the question of improvement and sanitization of carceral spaces aspires towards is counterinsurgent to the level of theory towards which this paper aspires. This paper submits that the emancipatory horizon whereby the structure of carcerality is merely improved obscures the structural reality of antiblackness that situates the ethical dilemma the Slave poses as untenable vis-a-vis the improvements of the field of psychology. (What is preserved at the expense of improvement?) This type of logic relies upon an effort to find a resolution for that which there is none, and in doing so, disfigures our ability to think of enslavement comprehensively as a relational dynamic that is, in its definition, a paradigm that is not amenable to shifts in experiences (e.g., enslavement ending in 1865). The narrative flat line of social death (Wilderson, 2020) whereby irrespective of the experience of antiblackness and the technologies of enslavement that have changed over the course of modernity (e.g., slave ship, Middle Passage, Slave estate, Jim Crow, the ghetto, and the prison-industrial complex), that which characterizes Black social life in all of its various *experiential* shifts remains ultimately *stagnant* under the shadow of Black social death. In other words, the discursive gestures related to the field of psychology’s improvement of its performance thinks of antiblackness and enslavement as an *inessential antagonism* to the World and to the existence of the institution of psychology itself. The solution-oriented thinking geared toward the sanitization of the institution of psychology in order to provide resolution cannot attend to a problem with no theoretical or actual recourse. Thus, an ethical assessment of psychology as a sociopolitical polity from the position of Blackness is not simply impossible, it is unthought and unimaginable without forcing the Black to be analogous to the Human through the besetting proliferation of discourses related to the improvement of the field of psychology. In point of fact, the type of thinking that assumes a possibility for the

improvement of the field requires a type of structural adjustment whereby such efforts are not held accountable to grammars of suffering. The antiblackness embedded in the genomic architecture of psychology's performances are indeed tragic, but knowing that the existence of psychology as an institution requires the ontological eviction of Blackness from categories of "psychological health" – whereby the Slave is what provides stability and coherence to the idea of "what is Life" – is designedly more. Testifying to the necessity of the world-making permanence of antiblackness that discard any curvature toward an asymptote of ethicality, Warren (2018) argues, "high crimes against the flesh are the murderous operations that set modernity into motion and produce the black body (or black being); these crimes are murders that the discourses of crime and punishment can only approach, but remain unintelligible within its precincts" (p. 44). The type of imposition posed by efforts to reform and improve the field of psychology neglect this asymptotic reality and foreclose our emancipatory horizon to a type of thinking that stops at the performances of the field of psychology instead of thinking of the Slave as the field's condition of possibility.

## Conclusion

While acknowledgments of antiblackness pertaining to the field of psychology insofar as its *performance* do exist, the structuring modality of its ideologies themselves *prior* to their performance has been largely uninterrogated. What this presupposes and supports is that prior to its performances, the field of psychology is indeed an ethical sociopolitical formation – that the issues addressed in the current paper's synchronic and diachronic analyses of the field's antiblackness are disconnected from the organic nature of its existence, but are performative, and can be used for good based on the practitioner. Insofar as the diagnosis is that the *performance* of the field of psychology is antiblack, any prescription thereafter already accepts the field as an ethical sociopolitical formation and can only seek to improve it. From Singh's (2020) urge to have critical theories (e.g., critical race theory) form the ground for which counseling psychology is conceptualized, to Neville and colleagues' (2021) decree for psychology to reimagine a "traditional understanding of curriculum and training" (p. 1263), and even to McIvor's (2020) optimistic "moral psychology of anti-racist democratic praxis" (p. 38) – these gestures' fail to reckon with the necessity of antiblackness within the organic nature of psychology as a sociopolitical formation and are emblematic of the field's investment in itself and are ultimately animated by a concern about how to maintain it. Put slightly differently but no less to the point, such gestures obfuscate how the Black's paradigmatic position of absolute dereliction is fundamentally required for the institution of psychology to exist.

On this account, efforts to redress psychology have no theory of or solidarity with the Black being – the violence of malpractice (e.g., clinician bias) can only think of itself from the view that it is just an example of psychology being performed in "bad faith" and *cannot* think of itself in terms of its ritualistic necessity – it is asleep at the wheel when considering itself in relation to the Slave, where such violence of antiblackness is neither bad faith, nor good faith, but the faith of the field itself. Again, an analysis grounded in the level of performance allows psychology's violence to be written off and deflated as "malpractice" (compared to a graver devastating reality that antiblackness is organic to the nature of psychology itself) that can be improved cosmetically then forces the Slave into a structural adjustment through which in order to think of the sanitization of psychology as a form of redress, the Black must be known as anything but Black – in other words, Human – in order to have any type of possibility of resolution with, or ethical relation to, the existence of psychology as a field.

Instead, what if the existence of the institution of psychology was unveiled from the veneer it sits behind – *not* under the guise of scientific evidence and healing *nor* as an avenue for Black liberation or even Black wellness – but in the way that Wilderson (2010) posed an invitation to reconfigure civil society to be “cast not as an infant cartography of budding democratic dilemmas, but as a murderous projection, a juggernaut for extermination?” (p. 207). If we return to Saisi’s (2021) discernment that “the creation of more ‘accommodating’ carceral spaces expands the carceral state in ways that are now rendered benevolent” (p. 220) we might ask, “what, to the Black, is a multiculturally competent institution of policing, prison staff, slave patrol?” We can save ourselves the mental gymnastics of this question and its various iterations (e.g., can the field of psychology be used for good), by recognizing that psychologists *are* cops/slave patrols and operate in/as an institution of policing that requires the Life force of antiblackness to be its touchstone of coherence, if that is as plainly as the point needs to be made for fulsome discussion and debate. If the ethical dilemma the Slave poses is taken seriously in a way that is held accountable to grammars of suffering whereby the Slave is not structurally adjusted, what new questions emerge for the field about its existence in relation to the Slave? From the coherence of the field of psychology as its condition of possibility, the Slave’s argument for the complete destabilization and disarticulation of the edifice of psychology as a sociopolitical formation is awaiting an answer.

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## Notes

1. Wilderson (2010) describes the use of the term "capacity" to mean: "a kind of facility or matrix through which possibility itself — whether tragic or triumphant—can be elaborated" (p. 45).
2. See Jackson (2013), which highlights how conceptualizing the behavior of Humans based on an "animal" human psyche allowed the discourse of human animality to bifurcate along racial lines. Antiracism positioned the Black below the ranks of those who possessed "animal instincts," (i.e., nonblack people and animals).

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