BOOK REVIEW – *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*

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In her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Simone Browne takes a look at surveillance practices in the United States through a lens that is often ignored. Browne masterfully applies blackness to an understanding of surveillance to examine how it is practiced, narrated, and enacted. She also explores how surveillance reifies race, which often leads to discrimination and/or violent treatment. Browne denies that surveillance is a new practice set in motion with the emergence of new technologies such as facial recognition, but instead traces surveillance back to the transatlantic slave trade and analyzes how race structured and continues to structure ongoing surveillance practices. *Dark Matters* is a well-researched and beautifully-crafted academic text that is important and necessary for its role in shining a light on the racial nature of surveillance.

Throughout the book, there are two key terms that Browne utilizes that are essential for an understanding of the surveillance of blackness. The first is "racializing surveillance." This type of surveillance is a mechanism of social control that concerns how norms pertaining to race are produced and decides what is "in or out of place." Browne uses the term to signal situations where surveillance reifies race, which often leads to discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized (p. 16). The second key term is "dark sousveillance." Browne describes dark sousveillance as a tool used to respond to, challenge, and confront all-encompassing surveillance, and to "mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance" (p. 21). This critique is a form of resistance that involves both the observation of those in authority and freedom tactics such as anti-surveillance, counter-

surveillance, and rendering one's self out of sight. Browne's centering of the book around these two concepts helps to shed new light on the surveillance of blackness, since is not often considered in popular discourse on surveillance, and shows the continuum of surveillance and surveillance technologies from transatlantic slavery to the present.

The book contains four chapters, which each explore different topics on the surveillance of blackness. Browne makes sure to integrate both key concepts into each topic, as well as broader concepts used in the field of surveillance studies. The book is organized chronologically, beginning with the transatlantic slave trade and ending with a description of present day, post 9/11 airport security. This allows Browne to connect the past to the present, showing how ongoing surveillance practices were structured and continue to be structured by race. For instance, Chapter One ("Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return") places the Panopticon (1786) and the plan of the slave ship *Brooks* (1789) side-by-side to examine what they say about surveillance and race. Browne is convincing in her subtle argument that the slave ship plan should be considered an early model of modern surveillance that is as equally important as the Panopticon, which was an idea for a high surveillance prison created by philosopher Jeremy Bentham that is typically considered the definitive model of modern surveillance. Browne looks to both models to examine what types of subjects were meant to be produced, how power was operated in both models, and in what ways the models were technologies of racializing surveillance.

The second chapter ("Everybody's Got a Little Light under the Sun: The Making of the *Book of Negroes*") moves forward to discuss illuminating surveillance technologies, such as "lantern laws" that required people of color to carry small lamps in the streets after dark, and how these technologies of seeing were racializing. The chapter also focuses on the 18th century *Book of Negroes*, which is a ledger containing the names and information of 3,000 former slaves who fled New York on British ships after the American Revolution. Browne skillfully explains how the information included in the ledger was a form of biometric information technology which, similar to today, was used in the surveillance of black mobilities. Chapter Three ("B®anding Blackness:

Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness") expands on the topic of biometric surveillance and its role in reifying race by attributing certain characteristics to black bodies. Browne examines the role that branding slaves played in both the development of modern biometric surveillance technologies and the commodification of black bodies, which still exists today. The final chapter ("'What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro?': Security Theater at the Airport") is a broad exploration of the airport as a social formation that frames security practices as having a history before 9/11. Browne also explores the ways in which race and racism affect people of color, especially black women, at airports – such as when TSA agents insisted that Solange Knowles must have been hiding something in her Afro. These chapters seamlessly work together to create an overarching study of surveillance through the little-explored, but important to understand, framework of blackness.

One important aspect of this work that assists in the production of a discourse on the surveillance of blackness is the clear and concrete connection between surveillance practices from the past to present. One example is Browne's clever comparison of the "no-sail list" that kept former slaves from leaving New York City with present day no-fly lists and other mechanisms that are in place to keep racialized subjects from crossing borders. Another example is the connection between the *Book of Negroes,* which was a surveillance technology rooted in slavery that utilized printed text to track blackness, and the modern passport, which is a printed mechanism that enables the tracking, accounting, and identification of the black body through the description of bodily markers. These examples, among others throughout the book, help to prove Browne's argument that race has structured surveillance practices from the era of slavery to the present.

Another extremely important aspect of the book that enhances the understanding of the surveillance of blackness is the intersection between gender and racializing surveillance. Browne sprinkles examples of this intersection throughout the book to strengthen each topic. One early example is the description of how slave ships were designed in a way that exemplified the gendering of sexual violence while simultaneously denying the existence of a woman's ability to resist captivity

and surveillance by placing women closer to the captain's cabin and leaving them unshackled. The fourth chapter also explores the intersection of gender and racializing surveillance by spending significant time on analyzing the experiences of black women, specifically in security theater at the airport. Examination of the intersection of gender and racializing surveillance is a necessary component to the field of the surveillance of blackness and the field of surveillance studies in general that should continue to be explored further.

Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness helps to open a new discourse surrounding the field of surveillance, which is relatively new in itself. Browne creates an understanding of surveillance as a field that cannot be separated from race. She achieves this goal by explaining how surveillance has been ongoing since the transatlantic slave trade and how, because of this, racism is present in surveillance practices today. Browne effectively leans on the concepts of racializing surveillance and dark sousveillance to show how surveillance reifies race, leading to discrimination and violence, and how this is resisted. Each topic explored, ranging from "lantern laws" to facial recognition to airport security theater, succeeds in furthering Browne's thesis. Anyone who is interested in studying surveillance or race will find this book both enjoyable and useful for its ability to expand upon the growing field of surveillance studies.
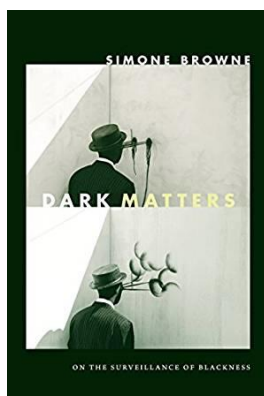
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