

# **The Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics<sup>\*</sup>**

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## Introduction

The subfield of black politics seeks to ask and answer questions that get at the heart of political science. How do purportedly irrational ideas about race influence the life chances of black and non-black citizens unequally? How do we enable minorities to fully participate in the democratic project? How have political citizens identified and self-identifying as “black” sought to respond to the general context of white supremacy? More specifically work in the United States has focused on critical issues of representation, of public opinion, political behavior, and political ideology. But black politics as a subfield has virtually ignored this turn towards neoliberalism. I would argue this renders the field unable to fully answer the questions it sets out to, as neoliberal governmentality shapes the contours within which black actors respond. More specifically it renders us unable to see how ideas about the black subject are shaped by this governmentality, and this not only infects black politics, but it infects American politics in general. Finally it renders us unable to see how the actions of black actors actually *shape* neoliberal governmentality.

In this chapter I perform a few tasks. I first present an overview of neoliberalism. Scholars have approached neoliberalism as a set of public policies, as an ideology, as a mode of governmentality. I argue that neoliberalism is best understood as a set of public policies and as a governmentality. I then examine the role that race plays in the deployment of neoliberal policies and neoliberal governmentality. Finally I conclude by analyzing the trajectory of the black politics literature and sketching the contours of what could be called “black governmentality”. As I note above, few within the field of black

politics (or racial politics for that matter) deal with neoliberalism even as they study its effects.

## Neoliberalism

The earliest usage of the term “neoliberalism” appears in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where it is used as a perjorative to describe an Italian economist who desired to return to the liberal principles of Adam Smith and his adherents (Thorsen and Lie 2006). But most situate the beginnings of neoliberalism in the intellectual work of the German *ordoliberals* and the Chicago School economists. Both sets of scholars were trying to figure out how to respond to rise of Naziism, Fascism, and Communism in Europe, to the Great Depression in the United States, and to accepted solutions to them (significant state intervention in the economy in the form of welfare policies and the like). For both sets of intellectuals Keynesian style state intervention actually *caused* totalitarianism rather than solved it. Their solution was to remove the policies that from their perspective actually created dependency on government.

At the time most thought their ideas radical. However with the onset of the economic crises of the seventies these policies and ideas were aggressively promoted. By the late seventies and early eighties politicians in the United States (Ronald Reagan), Great Britain (Margaret Thatcher), and elsewhere urged significant reductions in social services, calling for aggressive tax cuts in order to spur innovation. For them government was not the solution, it was the problem.

Twenty years later ideas formerly viewed as radical (school vouchers, privatizing social security, dismantling welfare, cutting taxes to raise government revenues) gained significant support in political circles, and they played a particularly important role in

shaping cities (Brenner and Theodore 2005). Before neoliberal policies were instituted, American cities were able to garner significant resources from the federal government in order to provide an array of social services. With the rising adoption of neoliberal approaches to government, federal funds were slashed, forcing cities to adopt a variety of policies designed to attract desirable populations with a focus on “the creative class” (Florida 2002, 2005), to makeup for reduced revenue via casinos, tourism, and cultural imaginings (Gotham and Haubert 2007; Pappas 2000; Kenny and Zimmerman 2004), and to police populations (Herbert 2001; Herbert and Brown 2006). Although by traditional social science measures neoliberal policies did not work as promised, nor did they have popular support, by the mid nineties neoliberal ideas and policies were the rule in states ranging from the aforementioned United States and Great Britain to South Africa and even China.

In analyzing neoliberalism some focus primarily on policies, examining education (Apple 2001; Hankins and Martin 2006; Laurie and Bonnett 2002; Mitchell 2003, 2006; Warren 2005), or urban policy (Fisher 2006; Hackworth 2007; Jones and Ward 2002; Katz 2008; Keil 2002; Kenny and Zimmerman 2004; Leitner and Sheppard 2002). And this approach is important in examining neoliberalism’s material effects, particularly on people of color. Some focus on neoliberalism as an ideology, and indeed this fits with the way some “acolytes” of neoliberalism such as Alan Greenspan think of it.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall’s (1988) work on Thatcherism is particularly important in outlining this approach, tracing the way in which neoliberal ideas become common sense. And some have focused on

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<sup>1</sup> Rep. Henry Waxman held a hearing on the roots of the current economic crisis and interrogated Greenspan on his role. Although Greenspan never explicitly referred to neoliberalism, he noted more than once that he had an ideology through which he viewed the world, and stated that as a result of the events he acknowledged that his ideology had a “flaw.”

neoliberalism as a new institutional order, seeking to figure out how it replaced the previous order (Blyth 2002). Following the lead of Michel Foucault { , 2008 #3032} some have begun examining neoliberalism as a political rationality or *governmentality*.

## **Neoliberalism as Governmentality**

Mitchell Dean (1999) defines government below as:

...any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects, and outcomes. (Dean, 1999, p.11)

This definition is relatively broad, moving beyond the state to consider the range of institutions and the types of techniques and technologies these institutions use in order to shape conduct. The term *governmentality* identifies a specific form of representation, allowing a specific problem or set of problems to be addressed as well as strategies for handling that problem {Lemke, 2001 #3012}.

The focus on rationality implies some type of critical standard against which institutional and self-practices are judged. This implies that governing is a moral task (although Foucault himself is clear that questions of effectiveness replace questions of right). This also implies agency. Hence, governing is not only about the rational activity that authorities and agencies employ in shaping conduct but also about the rational activity that individuals employ themselves in shaping their own conduct and the conduct of other individuals. What the broad definition of government allows for is not only the

study of various government actions and policies, but also allows for the study of “governing at a distance” that is to say, self-governing practices. Governmentality both defines a discursive field in which exercising power is rationalized, enabling the problems it identifies to be addressed, and it structures specific forms of intervention, processing reality in such a way that political technologies can be designed to attack it (Lemke 2001).

Scholars studying governmentality emphasize the dynamic relationship between patterns of thought (language, knowledge) and patterns of practice. Language is not simply a matter of describing or of justifying reality, it is both *performative and productive*, having a density and significance of its own (Rose and Miller 1992). Priests do not identify reality when they pronounce couples married, they create reality. Knowledge here does not just refer to ideas but also to the entire collection of bureaucrats, technicians, scholars, intellectuals, techniques, experiments, and projects that creates the expertise that makes governing (again broadly considered) possible (Rose and Miller 1992). Expertise is extremely important not only because it provides the technical know-how, it enables both government at a distance (individuals using self-help manuals to formulate programs of self-discipline) it also generates a form of technical knowledge that is able to place itself “above politics.”

How does this get us beyond ideology? It moves us to consider how subjects are constituted and how knowledge is garnered and employed—by what means are domains such as the market and the family devised? For what uses is the identity of a “consumer” deployed? And while discussions of public policy are critically important, dealing with both neoliberalism as public policy and neoliberalism as governmentality allows us to

consider instances in which neoliberal policies are absent or are waning in perceived efficiency even as neoliberal governmentality holds sway.

Foucault writes of governmentality in two different ways. Governmentality broadly considered is concerned with the development of a political rationality that is connected to political economy, and again this connection with political economy allows for the privileging of effectiveness based on internal conceptions of what government is supposed to do as opposed to questions of God inspired right.

But he also lectures about the development of a very specific form of governmentality—neoliberal governmentality.

Although the first known use of the term neoliberalism did explicitly denote a desire to return to earlier liberal principles, neoliberal governmentality is not an attempt to revisit 19<sup>th</sup> century forms of liberalism. While it does seek to reinstitute one central aspect of it (the importance of competition rather than exchange in the market) it is a very different enterprise. Traditional liberals believe that the market is a “natural” entity that only needs to be protected and nurtured by the state. For the neoliberals the central problem is that the market properly understood *does not exist*. There isn't too much liberalism, but not enough. The market has to actually be created through a series of political/institutional interventions that are themselves based on understandings of how the market is supposed to work, and based on how human beings are supposed to act.

Both the political and social domains then become subservient to the economic domain. Government is no longer analyzed based on whether it distributes wealth properly or on whether it meets the minimum needs of its citizens, but rather on whether it works efficiently according to the dictates of the market. Culture is valued to the degree

that it promotes the types of values and norms that produce reason and maximizing individual behavior.<sup>2</sup> The model of man that drives the liberal governmentality is *homo economicus*. This man is free “naturally” and his freedom is the precondition for a rational government that should endeavor to keep him free by not meddling in his affairs so he can participate in the activity of exchange with other free individuals within the market. Under neoliberal governmentality this man is malleable, and is structured through government (again broadly considered) intervention, and is developed in order to participate in the market as an entrepreneur responsible for the development of his own human capital. Here the neoliberal conception of capital labor differs significantly from that of Marx coming as the idea of human capital transforms man into a being who is not alienated from his labor but rather is the producer of his own capital which he then uses in order to derive income (Foucault 2008; Lemke 2001).

The chief criticism of neoliberalism is that it is contradictory—it promotes policies that seemingly decrease rather than increase liberty and freedom, and it calls for the reduction of the state while simultaneously expanding state activity. Both of these critiques can be put to rest. There are significant problems with neoliberalism, but inconsistency is not one of them. Because of its anti-naturalist take on the market, it requires state intervention to either create the market or to shape and mold the practices of citizens. Similarly the criticism that neoliberalism does not promote liberty or freedom would seem to be born out by the present reality in which literally millions of men and women are either out of work, out of a home, or *both*. However neoliberals would argue that the problem is not neoliberalism but rather the fact that individuals have not been

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Thatcher was excoriated for saying that “there is no society”. Here she was not arguing that “society” does not literally exist but rather that it should not be understood as existing according to a different set of rules than that of the market (Dean 1999).

disciplined properly. It is in this understanding of culture that they have a great deal in common with neoconservatives. In promoting policies like the privatization of social security, neoliberals are seeking to discipline individuals to take control over their own reality, by forcing them (through the state) to control their investment decisions. In promoting a Medicare prescription drug plan that forced individuals to make choices between literally dozens of prescription drug discount cards, neoliberals created a market where none existed before, giving individuals the power to “choose” the plan that worked best for them, increasing their human capital in so doing.

The study of governmentality involves an analytical perspective of government that is chiefly concerned with the ways in which “...thought becomes linked to and is embedded in technical means for the shaping and reshaping of conduct and in practices and institutions”(Dean 1999, p. 18). This entails examining fields of visibility of government, asking how a regime pictures who and what it is to be governed, asking how relations of authority and obedience are constituted in space, and finally asking how different locales and agents are connected with one another.<sup>3</sup> It analyses the technical aspect of government. What mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies are used to institute authority and accomplish rule? It regards the ways in which government both operates through *and* reforms social identities. What forms of person are presupposed by the different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek? What capacities do those who exercise authority (and those who are governed) assume? Finally, it looks to and at government as a thoughtful activity. What forms of thought, knowledge, expertise,

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<sup>3</sup> Here this approach borrows a great deal from the critical geography literature that is also concerned with the production and reproduction of power relationships in and through space (Chappell 2006).

strategies, means of calculation or rationality are employed in practices of governing? How does thought seek to transform these practices? How do practices of governing give rise to specific forms of truth? How does thought seek to render particular issues, domains, and problems governable?

I referred to the idea of “governing from a distance” as well as to the importance of expertise. In this case under neoliberal governmentality the process by which man is rendered *homo economicus* is a process partially determined by the state in as much as the state creates the rules that modify his behavior. But the state relies upon government technologies that go far beyond it—recall government as the global “conduct of conduct”. In fact, not only is man/woman able to in effect govern him/herself and others through means of accumulating knowledge that reproduces the entrepreneurial ethos, but the activities of the state are similarly able to be analyzed and critiqued according to the values of economic efficiency.<sup>4</sup> The reason that questions whether neoliberal policies “work” are wrongheaded then, because they do not begin from the correct premise. Neoliberal policies are designed to make individuals adopt the type of rational behavior that will allow them to effectively develop and become entrepreneurs of their own human capital. And the reason why critics and scholars alike are incorrect in noting that neoliberalism seeks to remove the state from the market given that neoliberals believe the market itself to be the product of government rules and regulations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here as Foucault (2008) notes the work of institutions such as the American Enterprise Institute are absolutely invaluable.

<sup>5</sup> Through this approach it becomes possible to examine self-esteem as a government technology that allows individuals to take up the goal of “self-esteem” and its concomitant disciplining practices for themselves using seemingly unrelated practices in women’s magazines and state policy as critical sites of inquiry (Cruikshank 1996; Blackman 2004). The rhetoric of individual responsibility employed in European Union attempts to educate and socialize immigrants, emphasizing the development of entrepreneurial characteristics rather than the development of values associated with democratic culture come under study (Mitchell 2003, 2006). George W. Bush’s call for the creation of an “ownership society”

Now at this point I have identified the three central approaches to neoliberalism as well as the approach that works best in encapsulating it. But we have not discussed the role that race plays in governmentality, and in neoliberalism. What work does race do here?

## **Race and Neoliberal Governmentality**

Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (1996) admit the importance of race and racism to the concept of governmentality while simultaneously ignoring it. Barbara Cruikshank (1996) briefly notes the persistence of racial inequality and its seeming noneffect on political stability. In a discussion held on Foucault's seminal *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1991) briefly notes that in resisting the new mode of discipline in prisons criminals were tagged as being a separate race and hence incorrigible, an idea reiterated elsewhere in the same volume by Colin Gordon (1991).

To be fair Foucault (2003) has addressed race explicitly in his pre-governmentality work even though he moved away from the subject as he began to develop ideas about governmentality. Under the old system of sovereignty the individual subject (theoretically) was guaranteed protection from external and internal threats. Under liberalism the production of freedom (freedom of the individual to pursue his interests) becomes more important. The management of risk and of danger becomes crucial here. The freedom and security of the individual has to be guarded against the

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can be understood as a (heavy handed) attempt to structure individual behavior, from his unsuccessful attempt to privatize social security, to his successful attempt to modify Medicare. And the "patient-consumer" becomes an example of how neoliberal governmentality is translated in biopolitical technologies through (among other things) metropolitan daily newspapers that structure their coverage of health around "patient-consumers" who actively seek health information and then self-regulate in order to produce healthy outcomes (Briggs and Hallin 2007).

encroachment of the collective, while at the same time the security of the collective has to be guarded against the encroachments of the individual. This generates what Foucault calls a new liberal “culture of danger”:

This political culture of danger has a number of aspects. For example, there is the campaign for savings banks at the start of the nineteenth century; you see the appearance of detective fiction and journalistic interest in crime around the middle of the nineteenth century; there are the campaigns around disease and hygiene; and then think too of what took place with regard to sexuality and the fear of degeneration; degeneration of the individual, the family, *the race* [italics mine], and the human species (Foucault 2008, p.66).

Here concerns about race are tied to concerns about biological (and cultural) degeneracy. The second time the term appears it is in the notes to his April 1979 lecture, which concerns 18<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of civil society:

[Man] has one set of dispositions which refer to his animal preservation, and to the *continuance of his race* [italics mine]; another which lead to society, and by inlisting him on the side of one tribe or community, frequently engage him in war and contention with the rest of mankind. (Foucault 2008, p. 314)

Although with this second passage it is clear that Foucault is using the term in its strict biological sense, implicitly referring to the *human* race, the rest of the passage suggests a different set of meanings. Foucault refers to race one other time in the work, in the conclusion, where notes it is but one set of characteristics that biopower produces.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Foucault tackled race and racism in previous work only to have it ignored by most of his interlocutors besides Ann Laura Stoler {, 1995 #3071}. We see the same pattern in the treatment of his work on governmentality.

Although racism clearly exists before this moment, it is at this time that the concern for population and its management binds racism to modern states {Terranova, 2007 #3138}.

Mitchell Dean (1999) using Foucault's ideas about race and racism discusses non-liberal forms of political rationality, distinguishing three different types—non-liberal forms of thought and practice that emanate from liberal rationalities, non-liberal forms of thought and practice that end up becoming viewed as legitimate within liberal democracies, and finally explicitly non-liberal forms of rule (Dean, 1999, p. 134). While an important component of liberalism is the agency and freedom it allots to the subject, there are individuals and groups within liberalism that are viewed as not being capable of agency and freedom. For those individuals, non-liberal interventions are required, up to and including death, particularly once the former connection between degeneracy and reproduction (positing that degenerates reproduce less than non-degenerates) is reversed in the theory of eugenics.

Race marks populations, establishing external threats that society must be defended and/or protected from. Within the nations involved in the transatlantic trade of Africans, I argue that the black subject becomes the central (though not only) illiberal subject. The very creation of the black subject as slave required an entire bureaucracy designed to identify/create black men and women, to surveil their public and private movements, and their public and private activities. The very skin of enslaved Africans was a badge that marked their status, such that freed Africans had to carry a pass to identify themselves as holding a status different from that of their enslaved brethren. This technology was reproduced and modified over time. The laws in Virginia regarding inter-racial marriage were gradually changed from allowing blacks and non-blacks to

inter-marry, to penalizing it {Franklin, 1988 #383}. Changed from allowing white masters to free their slaves upon their death to allowing it only if he had the resources to send him back to Africa.

Jim Crow was developed in the South to control black populations—but in order for it to work, the very meaning of “black” had to be defined in as stark a manner as possible. The census for a brief time collected data on “blacks”, “whites”, and “mulattos.” When Jim Crow became the law of the South, the mulatto category was expunged {Nobles, 2000 #3140}. And although couplings between white men and black women proceeded apace, couplings between black men and white women were treated harshly. During the height of Jim Crow black people were lynched at a rate of one per week, with many of them being lynched for the crime of sex with white women (regardless of whether it happened, regardless of whether it was consensual *if* it happened) {Dray, 2002 #309}.

When Emmett Till was dragged out of his grandfather’s home in Mississippi in the middle of the night after having allegedly whistled at a white woman while in a grocery store, his captors asked him repeatedly whether he consorted with white girls. After he repeatedly affirmed that he had white girl friends, his captors told him that he wouldn’t see the light of day, and that the war they were fighting against desegregation was about the protection of southern (white) womanhood {Hampton, 1986 #1852}. Black population was not the only population being controlled here—in identifying the black population as a problem to be managed not only did the state *create* blackness and the black population, it also created whiteness and the white population. The definition of whiteness as provided by the census was the absence of blackness {Nobles, 2000 #3140}.

I noted that the black population was the central but not only illiberal subject. Along with (white) populations deemed to be insane or criminal requiring special institutions, institutions were developed to control other non-white populations as well, with Chinese immigrants and Mexicans (who *became* immigrants) coming under particular forms of surveillance. If we take Thomas Holt's { , 2000 #521 } argument about the work that race does seriously we understand that the work changes as the material context changes. Thinking about this using the governmentality framework we can say that the work that race does changes as the problems and rationalities associated with governance changes.

In fact, I would go one step further. Not only does the work that race does change along with the context, part of the work of race is to actually make some possibilities more likely than others in the very act of choosing potential solutions to problems. The move towards neoliberalism as a set of policy solutions, as a particular governmentality was not a given. When Holt and others write about the shift from the pre-Fordist to Fordist to post-Fordist era, he takes the moments in between for granted. In as much as his goal was to simply chart the work that race does *within* each era or period this makes sense. But if we are not careful as readers, by simply taking Holt's focus as a given we ignore the fact that when the crises/opportunities that led to the disintegration of each given period arose there was a moment in which a number of alternatives could have conceivably occurred. When the Fordist era ends, the particular form of the post-Fordist era is not pre-determined. Similarly the Fordist era itself was not predetermined technologically or otherwise. A battle of sorts occurred that *led* to the specific shape that took form afterwards.

Neoliberalism as a set of political policies was not taken seriously politically or intellectually during the first seventy years of the twentieth century. What happened to change that? Blyth (2002) provides the best account. When the foundations of Keynesian economics (the bedrock of the post WWII world economic order) crumbled in the sixties leading to a moment of international uncertainty intellectual and business elites influenced by Friderich Hayek made a series of institutional and intellectual interventions that drove the adoption of neoliberal policies within the United States and elsewhere. In the United States specifically business elites developed think tanks for the dissemination of neoliberal ideas, began to seriously fund political candidates open to their ideas, and developed lobbying organizations that could fight for the legislative adoption of these ideas. In tracing the forms that neoliberalism took once it was instantiated, Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell {, 2002 #2336} argue that it occurs in two stages, a rollback stage in which Keynesian policies are rolled back, and a rollout stage in which neoliberal policies replace them.

But in discussing both the way in which neoliberalism was embedded in societies, and the specific way in which neoliberal policies were rolled out and Keynesian policies rolled back, race is largely ignored. Neither Blyth nor Peck and Tickell nor Harvey (2005), pay any attention to racial dynamics in their works on the subject. I argue that race worked not only within periods but between periods, helping to make certain possibilities more likely than others in the shift to the new era. Race here shapes the problems and solutions within, across, *and between* given time periods.

Race is used to generate consensus both for the Keynesian policy rollback (reducing programs that “fostered dependency”) and for the neoliberal policy rollout

(increasing programs that emphasized “responsibility”). But thinking about neoliberal governmentality, race is used to distinguish populations capable of becoming economic men (*homo oeconomicus*) from populations incapable of doing so, and along these lines is used to distinguish threats to the order (hence, populations deserving of death or at the very least of benign negligence) from the order itself.

Although the literature on racial attitudes largely ignores neoliberalism, its central findings are helpful here. According to the survey research whites high in racism (either “old” racism that emphasizes biological differences or its “new” or “symbolic” variant that emphasizes cultural dysfunction) express more support for punitive measures like forcing people to work as an anti-poverty measure and increasing jail sentences for criminals as an anti-crime measure than those low in racism (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Winter 2001). And even whites relatively low in racism as measured by surveys are more susceptible to being led to support punitive crime and welfare policies—the same ones associated with the rollout of neoliberalism. White citizens shown images of blacks on welfare, black criminals, blacks on death row, were much more likely to support workfare, increased jail time, and the death penalty, than people shown images of non-blacks (Gilens 1996, 1999; Gilliam Jr. and Iyengar 2000; Hughes and Tuch 2000; Peffley and Hurwitz 2007).<sup>7</sup> Supposedly with the rise of neoliberal governmentality criminals were no longer viewed as having a different set of values, no longer viewed as being a different race than the non-criminal. As Thomas Lemke (2001)

notes:

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough the one arena in which racial attitudes actually decrease support for the neoliberal rollout is in social security. Social security has been racialized just as welfare and crime have been, but in the opposite direction—social security is implicitly associated with deserving whites. As such whites high in “new” racism are even more likely to express support for social security than other whites (Winter 2006).

In the opinion of the neo-liberals, a criminal is not a psychologically deficient person or a biological degenerate, but a person like any other. The criminal is a rational-economic individual who invests, expects a certain profit and risks making a loss. From the angle of *homo oeconomicus* there is no fundamental difference between murder and a parking offence. It is the task of the penal system to respond to a supply of crimes, and punishment is one means of constraining the negative externalities of specific actions. (Lemke, 2001, p. 199)

This may indeed be the case, but support for the neoliberal policies that seek to on the one hand surveil neighborhoods thought to be high crime areas and punish individual perpetrators of crime (in order to rationally show them the negative consequences of committing crimes) increase when the perpetrator is non-white, indicating that the criminal may not be viewed as a different race, but under neoliberalism certain races are viewed as more prone to criminality.

This dynamic is replicated institutionally. While neoliberal policies designed to facilitate the movement of capital decreases regulation, neoliberal policies designed to discipline bodies and spaces often *increases* regulation. In the case of welfare there is a strong relationship between the presence of stringent welfare requirements and black population percentage (Keiser et al. 2004; Soss et al. 2008). The primary goal of neoliberal governmentality is to in effect rebuild and remake the subject so they can discipline and govern their own behavior to fit the new neoliberal order. Non-white subjects are viewed as being much less in control of their own actions and much more deserving of stringent top down policies that govern their behavior until they can gain the capacity to do so themselves.

Racism is a fundamental component of governmentality in as much as the particular construction of the black subject produces particular knowledge about that subject that requires specific solutions. It is not enough to say that the black subject is the illiberal subject—associating black bodies and spaces with the general problem of irrationality that must be dealt with if civilization is to continue to exist. To the greatest extent possible the specific *nature* of black illiberality must be determined.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act was passed by Bill Clinton in 1996 was passed with the express purpose of “ending welfare as we know it” but also to remove the racial stigma attached to welfare on the one hand and to the Democratic Party on the other, in order to make the Democratic Party a viable choice for white working class men and women {Edsall, 1991 #328; DeParle, 2000 #3141; Loury, 2001 #3142}. Although it is possible to imagine anti-immigration policies attached to images of black bodies, it is far more likely that such policies are going to be attached to Latinos (to Mexicans specifically) and to populations associated with the Middle East. Similarly it is possible to imagine Latino women depicted as “welfare queens” but it is difficult to imagine that unique combination driving anti-welfare policy. Indeed years after Bill Clinton effectively ended permanent welfare and AFDC, attitudes about black people still predict attitudes about welfare {Dyck, 2008 #3130}.

Studying the connection between racism and governmentality can help us fully understand the way in which neoliberalism became the political rationality of the land. In fact, in as much as racial politics have gone global it may also be helpful in understanding how it became the political rationality of the world.

However, particularly among scholars of US racial and black politics, links between racism and governmentality as well as between racism and neoliberalism have been few and far in between. Richard Iton {, 2008 #2953} devotes space to governmentality in his recent work on black popular culture, in order to make the case that the term should be used for a very specific population—the European population that Foucault implicitly created the concept for. Barnor Hesse {, 2004 #3143} uses it briefly to describe the connection between racism and modernity. And Adolph Reed {, 1999 #877} and Cedric Johnson {, 2007 #2358} have dealt with neoliberalism as an ideology and set of public policies that shape black political ideologies, but neither go into much depth here. We can and should continue to study the connection between racism and neoliberalism, in order to trace not only the work race does within a given period but the work race does in the shift between periods. However recall that governmentality is also about self-governance, about governing at a distance. Even as blacks as a whole have been depicted as being the illiberal subject it is clear that within black spaces some blacks have relative authority and power over others. How does the study of governmentality help us to understand black politics?

## **Black Politics and Governmentality**

In comparison to the previous 60 years of political science scholarship research on black politics has exploded.<sup>8</sup> Taken as a whole, this body of literature has significantly

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<sup>8</sup> With the increased use of large-N surveys, scholars have empirically examined the roots of black political participation {Bobo, 1990 #132; Dawson, 1994 #281; Gay, 2001 #402; Gilliam, 1998 #423; Harris, 2006 #1999; Leighley, 2001 #651; Tate, 1994 #1044}, black public opinion {Davis, 2003 #1280; Dawson, 1994 #281; Gay, 2002 #403; Gay, 2004 #404; Tate, 2003 #2878; White, 2007 #2038} and black political ideology {Brown, 2002 #166; Davis, 2002 #280; Dawson, 1999 #1506; Dawson, 2001 #283; Harris-Lacewell, 2004 #480; Spence, 2005 #1008}. With the increased election of black political representatives scholars asked whether they represented black citizens as well as their white counterparts {Gay, 2002 #403; Hutchings, 2004 #2952; Lublin, 1997 #694; Meier, 1984 #735; Swain, 1993 #1036; Tate, 2003 #1045}. Black culture (black popular culture, black cultural institutions including “the black church”) both

increased our understanding of black politics and political phenomenon as a whole. In his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B. Dubois asked “how does it feel to be a problem?” as a way of critiquing the way that negroes were treated by social scientists, not as subjects of study but rather as an object, a diseased one at that. Scholars writing within the subfield of black politics have taken great care to articulate the various and sundry ways that black political actors have developed their own modes of political engagement, and their own approach to politics.

But the most provocative line of research has moved to carefully consider the way in which resources within and between black spaces have been distributed. The work of Adolph Reed {1986 #873; 1999 #877} and Cathy Cohen {, 1999 #229} stand out here. Reed argues that the concept of “linked fate” used to predict black political behavior and public opinion is really an ideological attempt by black elites to substitute their specific interests for the interests of black people writ large. Cohen studying the politics of HIV/AIDS argues that HIV/AIDS represents an example of *secondary marginalization* at work. Cohen identifies four patterns of marginalization, categorical (marginalized groups are denied access to major institutions based on some shared characteristic), integrative (marginalized groups are *largely* denied access to major institutions), advanced (elite groups within already marginalized groups are given access to major institutions), and secondary (elite groups within already marginalized groups perform the task of policing and disciplining marginalized groups).

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expresses and is the consequence of politics {Cheney, 2005 #1679; Dawson, 1999 #1506; Gilroy, 1987 #2118; Hanchard, 2006 #1733; Harris, 1999 #2041; Henderson, 1996 #1675; Iton, 2008 #2953}. Finally, some have asked why, given the lack of significant economic progress, there have been no new black political movements {Reed, 2000 #878; Smith, 1996 #979}.

Applying her framework to the politics of HIV/AIDS in black communities she finds that black leaders (black pastors, black elected officials, black civil rights leaders), and black institutions (black churches, black civil rights organizations, black newspapers and magazines) first ignored the disease because they associated HIV/AIDS with gay (read *white*) men. Then when it was clear that the disease infected blacks at greater rate than whites, their response was two fold. They pushed for increased social service provision and education focusing on black women and children who contracted the disease unsuspectingly, and they implicitly and explicitly condemned black gay men and black injection drug users, blaming their behavior for its spread. The end result was that certain types of black populations were allowed to (and in some cases made to) die, while other black populations were given care and allowed to live. This is *biopolitics* at its essence, and Cohen's book was perhaps one of the first in political science to deal with biopolitics seriously. Black institutions and black leaders used norms and values generated and reproduced within black institutions to choose who within the black community was performatively "black enough" to live, and who was not.

I would argue that Cohen, in her study of black approaches to HIV/AIDS articulates something close a "black governmentality" in her own work. And I use the term in two ways. First I refer to the mode of governmentality that is routinely practiced on black citizen-subjects. Dubois' question about what it means to be a problem takes on a different tone when read along side Foucault's arguments about governing and problem-solving. The modes used to regulate and discipline black bodies and spaces given their status as the central problem, as *the* illiberal subject are different from those

applied towards citizens, who are expected to govern themselves.<sup>9</sup> The earlier forms of marginalization—categorical and integrative—were formal attempts to cordon off black bodies and black spaces politically, socially, economically, psychically. Blacks living under these forms of marginalization were largely rendered immobile by external forces. However at the same time that blacks were governed by external forces, with “govern” here again used broadly, internal forces also governed them. The second way I use the term “black governmentality” is to distinguish the unique mode of governmentality practiced by blacks upon other blacks and upon themselves.

Advanced marginalization is distinguished from categorical and integrative marginalization by the formal inclusion of politically excluded marginal groups and by the formal creation of new ideological myths justifying their inclusion. Advanced marginalization is the form of marginalization that occurs when formal modes of external exclusion have been eliminated. Nayan Shah {, 2001 #3146} uses the concept of the “citizen-subject” as a way to understand individuals as being equal politically while at the same time being constituted in and subject to disciplinary practices in various institutions. I believe this term is helpful, but I use it in a subtly different way, to not only refer to the individual who is both citizen and subject, but to the elite members of marginalized groups who are citizens *and who subject even while being subjects*. This modification takes into account group membership and status within that group. Cohen suggests that during advanced marginalization secondary marginalization (the marginalization of some subgroup members by elite members of the subgroup) becomes more important.

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<sup>9</sup> I recognize this dynamic is more complex than I note. One could make a case that the structure of Jim Crow was not only created to police black bodies but to police white ones, particularly white female ones. The Jim Crow laws could plausibly be understood as a means of controlling white bodies and preventing white female ones in particular from accessing black ones in the name of racial purity.

Particularly important are the discourses that group elites use to generate and reproduce exclusion within the group *in the name of the group*, what Richard Iton {, 2008 #2953} calls *respectability discourses*.

In as much as the governmentality literature does not take race into account, does not acknowledge the role of bottom-up processes in generating the forms of knowledge that constitute political rationalities, and similarly does not recognize the unique way that marginalized groups govern themselves binding Cohen's concept of marginalization to Foucault's concept of governmentality is helpful. It gives us a conceptual framework that allows us to think about the ways that governmentalities shift over time in response to the actions of marginalized groups (who in the process of fighting for inclusion generate new problems that must be solved), and by considering the way that marginalized groups themselves create and modify political rationalities.

But the work on governmentality also aids the study of marginalization.

How are marginalized groups themselves constructed? Cohen does not necessarily take the existence of marginalized groups for granted, and in fact addresses the politics behind the social construction of HIV/AIDS. But she is less effective in recognizing how institutions do not simply categorize, they produce knowledge and in producing knowledge also produce identities. Just as the disease HIV/AIDS itself was identified through a problem—what disease was responsible for the death of thousands of men in San Francisco during the late seventies and early eighties?—the population of men who engage in sexual activities with other men *while not claiming to be gay* was created by black experts in an attempt to study the spread of HIV/AIDS in black populations.

Furthermore in generating the practices designed to deal with the problem not only are institutions, ideologies, and identities important, but also important are *regimes of practices*. Where did the forms of knowledge that defined the problem population come from? Once the population of what came to be known as “down low” men were actually created what types of solutions were used to deal with them? Where did these solutions come from? The concept of advanced marginalization can be used to understand the way in which marginalized groups themselves use various strategies and techniques to marginalize subgroups within the larger group. However it can say little about the various strategies and techniques that are adopted. And in taking a top-down conception of power, in which dominant groups subjugate other groups, it does not acknowledge the possibility that those doing the dominating are also subjecting themselves. They police themselves even as they are policing.

Foucault distinguishes between governmentality and neoliberal governmentality. In the last section I noted that the work that race does not only shifts as the context shifts, but that race itself plays an important role in the shifting process. Cohen’s conception of marginalization is dynamic, accounting for change in group status as a result of shifts in the political economic context. But it accounts for the change in group status as a result of specific shifts in the political economic context, specific shifts in the way those characteristics which demarcated the group from other groups were treated within the law. Race was the means by which black people were prevented from voting, from serving on juries, from eating in certain restaurants, starting businesses in certain places, etc. And we can “substitute” race here for gender, or for sexuality, or (in some cases) for ethnicity. When race is no longer the means for explicitly excluding black people from

engaging in a variety of activities, a signal shift has occurred. When sexuality is no longer the means for excluding same sex couples from marrying, a shift has occurred. A new form of marginalization takes the place of the old one.

But Cohen's conception of marginalization has no role for the more general way that people are governed *that will itself shape the mode of advanced and secondary marginalization*.<sup>10</sup> The move from liberal governmentality to neoliberal governmentality is accompanied by a shift towards internal governing, but towards a form of internal governing driven by market principles. Black elites, institutions, and ideologies are shaped by this move. Given this move it is perhaps more appropriate to speak and write of black governmentality and black neoliberal governmentality.

At this point I have identified the work that race does in neoliberalism and in the shift towards a neoliberal governmentality. And I have used Cohen's concept of advanced marginalization in developing what I call black governmentality. How might we apply an analytics of government approach to black governmentalities?

The slave/Negro/Colored/Black/African American has always, even while seeking to be otherwise, been thought of as a problem, as I note above. Even as Dubois states to the reader that he leaves the question unanswered, a close examination of his scholarship from at least *The Philadelphia Negro* forward, to his political work in the NAACP reveals an attempt to solve this problem. And of course Dubois is not alone here. In fact the various attempts to end racial segregation in the courtroom in the voting booth in the streets and on the written page have all wrestled with this question in one way or another, usually though not always embracing the troubling framework of the "problem."

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, I *could* argue that Cohen's conceptualization of marginalization does not take the way that modes of marginalization both applied to and applied by marginalized groups may themselves become the means by which newer forms of marginalization are developed.

One question that an analytics of government approach seeks to answer deals with visibility. By what means does a micro-regime picture who and what it is to be governed? Here we can analyze the writings, speeches, and reports of black elites. In reproducing the idea of the Negro as problem, Dubois develops the concept of “double consciousness”. This concept depicts blacks as being psychologically torn because of the tension engendered by viewing themselves through the eyes of whites while simultaneously looking outwards at the world. Black elites adopt a rhetoric that emphasizes the new science of psychology. Even as Marcus Garvey attempted to develop black businesses as a means of empowering African Americans, his speeches consistently emphasized the lack self-esteem as the most fundamental problem facing blacks {Hill, 1987 #512}.

Also important are social science reports that reproduce the illiberal nature of the black subject. In studying black crime in the Jim Crow South black social scientists argued that while racism was an influence of far more importance were the sundry negative cultural traits that blacks exhibited {Oshinsky, 1996 #1407}. Even attempts to eradicate segregation relied upon this narrative. The Brown vs. Board decision turned not on an examination of the material or political consequences of segregation. Rather it turned on the expertise of black social scientists (Kenneth and Mamie Clark) who by means of an experiment showing that black children preferred white dolls to black dolls, and believed the black dolls to be inferior to the white ones. This experiment had significant flaws—the number of subjects was small, and Clark never explicitly connected the choice of a doll to feelings of racial inferiority, and even if this was shown he would have had a difficult time attaching feelings of racial inferiority to outcomes

above and beyond those generated by simple racism. However it fit within the larger narrative focusing on black psychological suffering {Scott, 1997 #953}.

Along with the reports and writings of black social scientists, the speeches of black activists, material culture was also important. Black newspaper editors and columnists as well as black social scientists promoted material culture (photographs, movies featuring all-Negro casts, books) that depicted dignified black men and women. These depictions worked as correctives in two ways. In one way they worked to correct white opinions about what black capabilities were (although whites neither watched movies with all-black casts nor presumably did they purchase black dolls). Whites seeing pictures of upright black families could not possibly continue to believe that blacks were inferior, that black men were crime prone, that black women were overtly libidinous {Mitchell, 2004 #1442}. But more importantly they worked to correct black behavior. Blacks would see these images of themselves, and then conduct the necessary public and private work to model this behavior.

The end result serves to shape black responses to racism, causing them to focus on techniques of self-government to cope with white supremacy, and in those instances where they deal with white supremacy directly it shapes the tactics and strategies they adopt in doing so. The concept of “uplift ideology” has been used to explain the way that members of the black middle and upper class often sought to control and police the behaviors of poorer black citizens. I would suggest that it is better to think of the process described by uplift ideology as part of black governmentality in as much as the rhetoric that black elites used was not used to simply justify the intra-racial division of resources, but to create it. Language is not simply descriptive here. Again, language is performative

and productive. It does not just clarify or obscure, it does not work to pull the wool over the eyes of ignorant subjects. It produces, shapes, creates.

How might we apply an analytics of government approach to the study of black neoliberal governmentality? By studying how regimes of practices crisscross institutions, ideologies, and practices that we might think of as part of contemporary black politics. In examining black political representation, some have juxtaposed modern black elected officials against their predecessors along the axis of political style. Compared to mayors such as Washington D.C.'s Marion Berry, and Detroit's Coleman Young, scholars argued that Newark's Corey Booker, Washington D.C.'s Adrian Fenty, as well as early nineties mayors like Detroit's Dennis Archer were much less likely to focus on race and much more likely to emphasize racial comity in winning election {Bai, 2008 #2880; Persons, 1993 #840; Preston, 1987 #854}. Although analyzing election strategies is important given that such strategies can serve as cues about governing styles, what is perhaps more interesting using an analytics of government approach is an analysis of how black mayors—until the election of Barack Obama arguably the black elected officials with the most political authority—conceptualized governance. What did black mayors perceive their central problem to be once they took office? What types of solutions did they employ in order to solve this problem? To the extent that they graphically depicted their problem to their staff, to other political officials, to citizens, what images did they employ? What type of language did they use? What types of institutions are responsible for shaping their approach to governance? For developing policies designed to discipline black citizens?

Similarly thinking about black representation in a broader fashion, black public intellectuals and black leaders such as Rev. Jesse Jackson and Minister Louis Farrakhan have also sought to both define and develop solutions to the modern black problem. To what extent does their attempt to problematize black urban life in particular share a common framework that overcomes ideological difference? Minister Louis Farrakhan for example is a staunch (conservative) black nationalist, while social scientist William Julius Wilson is a liberal integrationist. What leads them both, along with President Barack Obama, to condemn the lack of black male responsibility and to connect that lack of responsibility to increased poverty in black communities?

Black institutions such as the NAACP, the black church, and black fraternities and sororities have played an invaluable role in developing black political capital. To the extent that we can think of the move in black spaces towards developing means of objectively electing leaders and of holding them accountable, as a move towards black political modernization, black organizations such as Delta Sigma Theta, as well as civil rights organizations such as the NAACP were invaluable. How have these institutions developed regimes of practices and tendencies of thought that reflect a belief that corporate models of governance are the most efficient and effective at empowering African Americans? How might the phrase bandied about in fraternity circles of “running the frat like a business” connect with the development of an approach to the gospel that emphasizes using biblical principles to develop spiritual *and financial* capital? And how might these connect with a simple name change from “President” to “President/CEO”?

I have focused on black institutions, elected officials, and intellectuals.  
Furthermore I have focused on institutions, officials, and intellectuals within the United

States, even though black politics is diasporal. To what extent can we find these same patterns in Africa and in the Caribbean as well as in other international spaces (local, regional, and national) where black communities exist? What global processes occur to ease the flow of this specific form of black governmentality over space?

Given recent events it at least appears that neoliberal policy approaches are falling out of favor in the United States. However this does not mean that neoliberal governmentality is falling out of favor, particularly in black spaces. Focusing on what distinguishes black neoliberal governmentality from other modes, and analyzing the means by which black neoliberal governmentality has come to shape black political ideology, black political institutions, and black political practice, should lead to insights about the connection between power, knowledge, and biopolitics in black communities throughout the diaspora. Furthermore given the role that race has played in the spread of neoliberal governmentality, it should lead to insights about the connection between power, knowledge, and biopolitics, in the modern political moment.

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