



Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness

Simone Browne

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In *Dark Matters* Simone Browne locates the conditions of blackness as a key site through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and resisted. She shows how contemporary surveillance technologies and practices are informed by the long history of racial formation and by the methods of policing black life under slavery, such as branding, runaway slave notices, and lantern laws. Placing surveillance studies into conversation with the archive of transatlantic slavery and its afterlife, Browne draws from black feminist theory, sociology, and cultural studies to analyze texts as diverse as the methods of surveilling blackness she discusses: from the design of the eighteenth-century slave ship *Brooks*, Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, and *The Book of Negroes*, to contemporary art, literature, biometrics, and post-9/11 airport security practices. Surveillance, Browne asserts, is both a discursive and material practice that reifies boundaries, borders, and bodies around racial lines, so much so that the surveillance of blackness has long been, and continues to be, a social and political norm.

Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness Details

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From Reader Review Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness for online ebook

Rhya says

Browne traces the surveillance of blackness from past to present. While at times infuriating, the book is important. What's also great about Browne is that there is an element of hope in her writing as each chapter concludes with a description of an art installation that "talks back" against these practices.

Mtume Gant says

Provactive argument and great addition to the ongoing discussion of how Blackness exists in America's seemingly contradictory consumer but also surveillance world. Wish the book was a bit more exhaustive, I was constantly left with many questions, especially in wondering how the author perceived the existence of her historical findings (especially around slave branding) in contemporary society, so I actually wanted MORE. It also feels at time a little scatterbrained but I think thats because of my wish for a bit more. But its a great piece, a great way to look at surveillance as not just "policing" or "discipline" but also its the collection of data that aims to commodify, place and oppress by creating systems. I hope she does a follow up because I feel there are more avenues to touch.

Sabrarf says

One of the best reads about the surveillance of black people and blackness. To hard to read it by yourself. I will definitely advise you to talk with your friends after reading it. It's heavy and hard to just read it and not think about it all the time. You can see Fanon's footprint in it and a great analysis of his book Black skin, white Mask through the book.
Highly Recommended people!

Miguel says

In the conclusion of *Dark Matters*, Simone Browne asks the rhetorical question she has gestured toward all along: "could there be some potential in going about unknown or unremarkable, and perhaps unbothered, where CCTV, camera-enabled devices, facial recognition, and other computer vision technologies are in use?"

In Browne's interdisciplinary study on modern and historical surveillance, she draws attention to the relationship between oppressive surveillance practices in the context of chattel slavery in the United States and the modern airport security theater. She also draws out the potential for refusal in the space of modern biometric technology that is built on an assumption of prototypical whiteness. If the response of Hewlett-Packard to their camera's inability to detect black faces is to suggest that users include more light in the frame, how is that distinct from the "lantern laws" of 1713 New York City that regulated the mobility of black and Native American enslaved people? It is through the rigorous analysis of these unexplored or unexposed connections that Browne interrogates notions of surveillance and opens up space for refusal.

Browne also engages in great readings of contemporary art pieces related to surveillance, brands, and branding. She also draws attention to the absurd and outdated premise of biologically determined race that is the fundamental assumption of biometric R&D divisions. Browne's work is a broad survey that opens the door for a certain kind of inquiry into surveillance and the modern constitution of the racialized subject.

Mike Mena says

Absolutely brilliant. Academic but accessible. Intellectually profound but highly entertaining. Will assign to students in the future. (Also, will be of interest to Foucaultian scholars.)

Sara Salem says

Amazing book on race and surveillance that traces how Black bodies in the US have been central to surveillance for centuries. A must read! And she uses a lot of my bae, Fanon :)

Kristine says

???????

Derek Fenner says

A book that does exactly what it has set out to do: "to situate the dark, blackness, and the archive of slavery and its afterlife as a way to trouble and expand understandings of surveillance" (p.164).

Mills College Library says

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