



**CRITICAL
RACE
CONVERSATIONS**

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Research

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Race, Philosophy, and Political Thought

DESCRIPTION: Dialogue with Owen Williams, Sharon Achinstein, Charles W. Mill, Jennifer L. Morgan, Robert Bernasconi
Monday, June 21, 2021

OWEN WILLIAMS: Welcome to Critical Race Conversations, a series hosted by the Folger Institute with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I'm Owen Williams, Associate Director for Scholarly Programs at the Folger Institute. We are delighted to gather so many friends, old and new, for these conversations. Thank you for joining us today. This series of free online sessions features scholars who are offering new insights into the pre-history of modern racialized thinking and racism. Our speakers are addressing deeper and more complex roots to enduring social challenges, and they're conducting more inclusive investigations of our contested pasts, all with the goal of creating more just and more inclusive academy and society.

WILLIAMS: The Folger Institute is providing the framework and the platform for these conversations, but as is our practice, we turn to scholars across disciplines to lead discussions from their own experience and expertise. For this past year, we have been listening and learning from those who are more knowledgeable about the field of Critical Race Studies. Across this series, we've also been learning how to foster dialogue and present content through new technologies. This session is being recorded and will be posted on the Folger's YouTube channel as soon as it's processed with closed captioning enabled and a verified transcript uploaded in the coming days.

WILLIAMS: For our brief Q and A, we will collect questions for our speakers from both the YouTube chat and Twitter, with the hashtag "#FolgerCRC." Today's session on Race, Philosophy, and Political Thought will be moderated by Sharon Achinstein, who will soon introduce Charles W. Mills, Jennifer L. Morgan, and Robert Bernasconi. This event is associated with the Folger Institute's Center for the History of British Political Thought, which was established in 1984 with a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant.

WILLIAMS: In the years since, through a series of carefully plotted seminars, symposia, and publications, the Center has remapped the main patterns of thought and discourse of a major political culture over three seminal centuries. Welcome, all, and we look forward to this conversation. Sharon.

SHARON ACHINSTEIN: Good afternoon, and welcome to this critical conversation. This edition is sponsored by the Center for the History of British Political Thought, which is currently chaired by Professor Nigel Smith. I'm in the English department at Johns Hopkins. And the Center was considering in its planning for this programming recognizing that the historical fields in British political philosophy and political culture, and in the history of ideas, have often been slow to incorporate insights from the critical philosophy of race, and the work in materialist, feminist, and social histories of race and slavery.

ACHINSTEIN: I'm aware of the high walls between disciplines history, philosophy, cultural history, literature, social history, as well as the variety of methodologies. But I'm also eager to find out if listening in might help us to find ears for what's on the other side of the wall. And over the next hour and a bit, [CLEARS THROAT] we might find a common language or find the distinctions necessary to recognizing the centrality of race to the project of modernity. As Charles Mills said, the overwhelmingly white majority professorate should by trying to incorporate such material into their courses. And we're hoping that this conversation is a way to do that, as well as a way to challenge ourselves to think more broadly.

ACHINSTEIN: I'm going to introduce the three speakers, then each of them will speak for about five to 10 minutes. After that, there will be an open conversation between them. And in the last 15 minutes, time for questions from the audience. I hope you will be putting some of those into the YouTube chat function. Jennifer Morgan is Professor in the Departments of Social and Cultural Analysis and History at New York University, where she's chair of the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis. The author of *Laboring Women: Gender and Reproduction, and the Making of New World Slavery*, 2003.

ACHINSTEIN: Her newest book is just out, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic*, 2021, and it challenges Orlando Patterson's concept of slavery as social death. That is, a static juridical category seeing the condition of slavery as not so fixed. Rather than a category, slavery should be seen as a predicament, the enactment of meanings that were changeable and in formation. And Morgan wants us to think not only about the process of transformation of people into commodities, but the thought work that gestated into what she calls the neutrality, calculability, and rationality that is the discourses of economy, trade, markets, numbers, and capital.

ACHINSTEIN: Robert Bernasconi is Edwin Earl Sparks Professor of Philosophy and Africana Studies at Penn State University, specializing in 19th and 20th century continental philosophy and critical philosophy of race. A philosopher who has long

demanded that a critical study of the historical formation of the concept of race is central to understanding the canon and to breaking open the canon. His work has been frontline with a plethora of articles and books, and also back of the office, if I might say.

ACHINSTEIN: That quiet and crucial work of bringing out volumes of work that shape a field, mentoring, showing intellectual curiosity and openness in such volumes as *Race and Anthropology*, *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, *Concepts of Race in the 18th Century*, and with Tommy Lott at Hackett, *Readings in Philosophy on the Idea of Race*. He's one of the founding editors of the journal *Critical Philosophy of Race* and has published more than 25 volumes of primary literature on the history of the concept of race.

ACHINSTEIN: Charles Mills is a leading thinker in the History of Social and Political Philosophy as it concerns gender and race. Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center CUNY, City University of New York, his first book, *The Racial Contract* from 1997, which is now being prepared for a new 25th anniversary edition, having sold over 50,000 copies. It introduces the titular concept of contract that permits white people to violate their own moral principals in dealing with non-white individuals.

ACHINSTEIN: In his sixth book, *Black Rights, White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, 2017, he argues that the history of denying equal rights to Black people and other people of color racializes liberalism in fundamental ways and we're still living with its legacy today. I'm so looking forward to this conversation. The order of presenters will be first, Professor Mills, then Professor Bernasconi, and then Professor Morgan. Thank you for joining in.

CHARLES W. MILLS: Well, first of all, my congratulations to you guys for this initiative. It's great that you're doing this, especially in a time period when, as I don't have to tell you, there's been this backlash from the right saying, "This is stuff we don't need to know, stuff we don't want hear, stuff we want to shut down and close down if at all possible." So, I think this is going to be a sort of ongoing issue for the next few years, if not longer. And I'm delighted that you've taken this kind of stand on it. And of course, I'm honored to have been invited to participate.

MILLS: So, I put my thinking cap on on the subject of race and political philosophy, and I came up with, you know, seven obvious topics. So, I'll just sort of go through them, doubtless there are more. First of all, you could sort of look at the issue of race and political philosophy in terms of the study of overtly racist political philosophies. So, Naziism is the obvious candidate, sort of a paradigm bad guy. It's really important to sort of recognize that racist political philosophies take other forms, as well.

MILLS: 19th century imperialism and colonialism was guided by such philosophies, and in the content we've seen, of course, in contemporary white nationalism. That's

an example, as well. Second, there's race-centered but arguably anti-racist political philosophy. And the tendency among the opponents of this kind of approach is to conflate the two, and say that, you know, any political thoughts that deal with race is by that definition racist. Whereas, you know, many of us [INAUDIBLE] insist that you can have an anti-racist Black nationalism.

MILLS: In the Latin American tradition there is indigenismo. And that, you know, you can have Black liberalism, and Black Marxism that bring race into the equation, and they're not racist, they're race sensitive. Number three sort of crucial aspect, and Robert, of course, has done so much work in this respect, the role of political philosophers in creating race. I don't mean he's done work in contributing to creating race, but in documenting it.

MILLS: So, Kant in particular for modern racism. There's also a new body of work by Classicists and Medieval scholars who argue that, in fact, you can find race as far back as antiquity, and that Aristotle, certainly one of the founding giants of the Western philosophical tradition, Aristotle should be seen as a sort of pioneering racist thinker of the Western tradition. So, what you'd be doing there is sort of looking at, you know, crucial Western political philosophers, the canonical figures, and sort of bringing into full view their role in contributing to the creation of race.

MILLS: Number four, and this may sort of contrast with the first one, overtly racist political ideologies, the influence of race on political philosophy even when not formally flagged as such, even when not overt. And this is a situation, you know, we have been in until recently. Where you could say, of course, you know, of the Trump years, we had a sort of return to the more overt racism of the past. But the idea is that we were in an epoch of color blindness, of post-raciality, and certainly dominant political ideologies that assert nobody's racist.

MILLS: And the challenge, then, is to show that despite a facial neutrality, in fact race continues to shape our political philosophy, or the dominant political philosophy in the United States, liberalism—the liberalism of the left or liberalism of the right. And the idea is to sort of point out that there's not this sort of clear-cut separation that one would like in overt racist ideals like Nazism and a sort of racialized liberalism of the past, and that in fact, there's lines of continuity.

MILLS: And one really embarrassing example is that in the early 1930s, you know, when the Nazi regime is being established, Nazi jurists are looking around the world for a role model to sort of establish the racial state. And the idea is, if you'll forgive a bit of national stereotyping, they're German, they want to do it proper, they want to do it thoroughly, they look around the world and, you know, they seize upon the United States as the number one example on the planet of a racial state.

MILLS: So, the idea is that Jim Crow segregation was, you know, the initial model the Nuremberg Laws, the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws of the 1930s. So, that the sort of sharp dichotomization, Nazism over here, liberalism over here, you have to

sort of bring them closer together and recognize that liberalism has historically in the modern period been racialized. And arguably, even the liberalism of today, in the sort of post-civil rights epoch, continues to show the impact of race.

MILLS: Number five, and relatedly, we need to sort of explore the relation between race and the crucial array of concepts that in a sort of definitive or political philosophy. So, any discipline or sub-discipline as it's particularly in a set of, you know, ways of dividing up the world, a particular social ontology, a particular theoretical apparatus. And part of the point of the challenge from radical political theory, whether it race or gender, whatever, is to sort of look at these concepts and say, "Are they really neutral, or so they in fact reflect these biases?"

MILLS: The clear-cut example, of course, is the feminist critique. You know, I like to think of second wave feminist theory, and the way it sort of looked at liberalism, the way it challenged how the public-private distinction had been drawn, the way it said there are all kinds of things that we need to think of as political that have not in fact been framed as political because you've had a male-centered and androcentric conception of what the political is. And a parallel argument can easily be given in terms of race, and, you know, what counts as political in standard courses, and textbooks, in discussions of political philosophy.

MILLS: So that imperialism is a system of racial domination, colonialism, these are not seen as political, they're not part of the vocabulary. So that the very silence on these subjects is a testimony to the racialization of the discipline. The exclusion of imperialism, colonialism, the history of European settler states from what, you know, we teach as political philosophy, and, you know, what kind of, you know, concepts and values go along with it.

MILLS: Number six, there's also the question of how we conceptualize the state. And there's the liberal tradition, of course. So, if you go back to John Locke versus Sir Robert Filmer, the idea is that the liberal democratic state is an inclusive state. It's an inclusive state, it's a state of, you know, nobody being above the law, the state that recognizes everybody's rights. And as such, it's set in opposition both to the pre-modern authoritarian state, and then moving on to the 19th and 20th century it's in opposition to the totalitarian state.

MILLS: So, the liberal democratic state is the state of the good guys. And the problem is that while this is great as an ideal, it has rarely been lived up to in practice. So, just as you had the left critique from Marxism of the liberal state as a bourgeois state, the state of the ruling class; just as some feminists have argued that you need to see the state as a patriarchal state, there's an emerging body of work on the liberal state as a racial state. So, the racial state should not be confined just to Nazi Germany.

MILLS: There's a famous book on Nazi Germany, *The Racial State* by David Theo Goldberg, a well-known race theorist, argues that the modern state in general

should be seen as a racial state insofar as it presides over, so far as it facilitates colonialism, imperialism, racial slavery, and so-forth. And then finally, to end on a positive note, there's a challenge in terms of race and political philosophy: What does one do? And of course, one response is a color blind eliminativist response. Any mention of race is bad, and sort of get rid of race altogether, let's not talk about it.

MILLS: Whereas the approach that I would recommend, of course, the color-conscious one, what you need is a political philosophy that is race sensitive. A political philosophy that sort of recognizes history and present of racial domination, and then asks the question, "How do we articulate concepts, how do we devise a conceptual apparatus within the descriptive realm of our understanding of how the polity works in the normative realm of issues of racial justice? How do we devise an apparatus that's going to correct for the legacy of the past and it's sort of continuing influence on the present?"

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you, Charles. I'm going to just ask a very quick follow up and break with the protocols we've been discussing. Those in literature and other disciplines may not know the difference between descriptive and normative. Can you just give a tiny capsule, bite size...

MILLS: Yes, of course.

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you.

MILLS: So, the standard characterization is that descriptive, you're basically giving a characterization of the way things actually are. Whereas in normative, you're basically sort of outlining a model of how things should be. So, you're making judgments about good and bad, ideal and non-ideal, just and unjust. So, within political philosophy, the sort of distinctive area of the normative is social justice. And the area of race, which is what we're talking about, the question then is, "What would a racially just society look like?" We know what our actual society looks like, what would a racially just society look like?

MILLS: And here is a startling fact: I don't have to tell you how central racial justice as a slogan and a theme has been to the discussion of the past year or so, the post-Floyd demonstrations. If you look at political philosophy, in the sort of Anglo-American dominant tradition, supposedly revived in 1971 by the work of John Rawls, if you look around for any systematic treatment of racial justice in this vast body of work, there would hardly be anything. So, this to me is an indication of how you can have a discipline that's racialized without being facially so,

MILLS: It's not that it says, "We're only interested in justice for white people," but in fact, if you look at the actual body of work and exclusion of racial justice as a theme, it's a racialized body of discourse.

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you. We'll move on to Robert Bernasconi. Thank you.

ROBERT BERNASCONI: Thank you, Sharon. And I want to thank the Folger Institute for including me in this. I want to thank Charles for setting it up so nicely with his seven themes. Fortunately, I didn't come up with the same seven themes. That would've been kind of boring. [LAUGH] We didn't get together on this. Instead, what I'm going to try and do is distinguish three concepts that are often confused. But before going there, I want to just take a step back and highlight some of philosophy's failures when it comes to racism.

BERNASCONI: So, at the beginning I'm talking about philosophy as an academic discipline. I will become more optimistic when I contemplate the possibility that academic philosophy might increasingly include other voices, the voices of those who frequently go unheard because they don't conform to the conventions that the discipline imposes as a prerequisite for getting a hearing.

BERNASCONI: I'm also going to assume that in this better future that I'd like to think we're moving towards, the discussion will be more interdisciplinary, and in particular, there will be more recognition of the importance of the rigorous study of primary documents. Philosophers have so much to learn from historians, which is why I'm happy to be included in this conversation. When I talk about philosophy's failures, I'm not just talking about the role of canonical philosophers in the introduction of the concept of race, and of propagating false and misleading stories they knew to be false and misleading.

BERNASCONI: I'm thinking obviously of Kant and Hegel here, but it could be others. I'm not just talking about the failure of almost all canonical philosophers within the Modern period to be at the forefront of the fight against slavery. And I'm not just talking about how few philosophers teaching in the United States in the years immediately leading up to the Civil War were ready in their lectures in moral and political philosophy to question with any real seriousness the legitimacy of slavery, even though they were well aware of the discussions that had come to a very different conclusion at that time in Europe.

BERNASCONI: I say I'm not just talking about those things because they belong to the past, but they continue into the present. And I'm concerned with the failures of philosophers today. The failure still today to reexamine the formation of the philosophical canon and open it up to debate. The almost neglect, total neglect, of contemporary philosophers still today when it comes to the study of slavery in the 18th and 19th century.

BERNASCONI: If you look at textbooks on the history of political philosophy—and this is true also of books coming out of political theory departments very often, not just philosophy—slavery is almost nowhere to be seen. You could get the impression that no one was talking about slavery. But all these modern

philosophers talk about slavery a lot, and yet we never talk about it. We never look at the discussions because we're not proud of them, presumably.

BERNASCONI: But we should be examining their failures in order to learn from them. Philosophy presents itself as a discipline that is going to instruct us in ethics, that's why we justify our existence very often. And yet we won't examine the ethics that we've been teaching very often continuations of the previous forms of ethics. And of course, there's the fact that philosophy is among the whitest of all the disciplines in the liberal arts still today.

BERNASCONI: Now, I believe no one has done more to change this situation than Charles Mills, whose 1997 book, *The Racial Contract* has done a great deal to transform the discipline. One wonders if critical philosophy of race would be a thing, a sub-discipline which people get hired to teach, if it wasn't for Charles. So, it's a great honor to be in conversation with him today.

BERNASCONI: But what is critical philosophy of race? It's not a set of dogmas. It's not even an interpretive framework of such, it might turn into one. It's an attempt to put philosophy to work to assist in the fight against racism by rendering racism more visible and more intelligible. Some people, including philosophers, still tend to focus almost exclusively on the racism of individuals. They do so by abstraction, or by focusing almost exclusively on lived experience.

BERNASCONI: But whenever philosophers look at racism at the level of individuals, either from the standpoint of the racist or of the oppressed, by isolating it from the forces-legal, moral, economic, political, and always historical-that produce that racism and those effects, all hope of understanding the meaning disappears. I've been talking earlier about academic philosophy as an institution.

BERNASCONI: We know we cannot get to the institutional racism of philosophy simply by studying the individual philosophers in the discipline. If we want to understand why no moral philosopher teaching in the United States in the years before the Civil War addressed slavery, we would need to ask a whole set of questions: How did those institutions function? The pressures that were on them. Who was teaching these courses?

BERNASCONI: Usually it was the president of the university, and the president was appointed by a board that was often religiously affiliated. They were trying to attract students. You have to look and see where the money is, who's paying for the students to go to the college to understand why they're teaching that slavery is legitimate in that college. I know there were one or two philosophers, [INAUDIBLE] is a good example of a philosopher who goes against slavery.

BERNASCONI: But for the most part, you have people who even when they're anti-slavery, someone like Francis Lieber, he won't say anything to that effect in his lectures. So, it's clear that to understand institutional racism, we would need to look

at structural racism. In other words, we need to go further, take a broader view, and look at these forces that I've just identified.

BERNASCONI: Those forces that frame the institution and secure its survival. So, I know I'm moving very quickly, but I've moved from individual racists, through institutional racism, to structural racism. And we would then have to undergo a genealogy of the notion of racism. We need to understand how you didn't have the word racism in the English language—well, hardly at all—until round about 1938.

BERNASCONI: Before then, people talked about racial prejudice, but racial prejudice was thought by many people to be a good thing. It was an evolutionary-designed mechanism to keep the races apart. Racism becomes a concept in English as a way of describing anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany based on the biological claim that Jews constitute a race.

BERNASCONI: It's only from that starting point that it comes to include anti-Black racism. But the conception of racism is not modeled on the way Blacks were treated, it's modeled on anti-Semitism. And that's why Fanon in 1956 has to introduce the concept of cultural racism to go against this narrow conception of racism. And then in 1967, I believe it was, Stockley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, they're the ones to introduce the notion of institutional racism.

BERNASCONI: But for them, it means acts by the total white community against the Black community. From there, institutional racism becomes more narrowly defined, particularly in the United Kingdom, and then gets imported back into the United States in something like the sense that I just described it. But today, the challenge that faces us is how do we make sense of this notion of systemic racism that we hear everywhere, but nobody is willing to define, nobody is willing to explain.

BERNASCONI: For a lot of people, it just simply means the wide-spread prevalence of racism. In other words, it becomes a statistical concept. But it does nothing thereby to render racism more intelligible. It provides only an account of how there is prima facie evidence of racism.

BERNASCONI: Now, in my own work I've tried to draw on resources from Fanon and the late Sartre that to address these kinds of questions around how we make systemic racism more intelligible. And in doing so, I've always found myself having to turn to history in order to do so. And that's why it's such a privilege and a pleasure for me to be on the same screen as Jennifer Morgan, whose book *Reckoning with Slavery* came out at the weekend, I've already read it.

BERNASCONI: I recommend that you all do so, as well. Because you see if you compare it with her earlier book *Laboring Women*. *Laboring Women* is archival, it's statistical in many respects, I mean, it's much more than that. But in the new book, there's a profound reflection on methodologies of how we negotiate the relative

absence of Black women from the archives of slavery, and yet their central role within the perpetuation of slavery as a system.

BERNASCONI: And so, you can see what Jennifer, if I may call you by your first name, Jennifer in her book is engaged with very many of the same methodological issues that the critical philosopher of race is. She's drawing on the work of people like Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Fred Moten, Cedric Robinson, and so on, Christina Sharpe, the kinds of people that I'm engaged with when talking with my students. We're sharing many of the same texts.

BERNASCONI: And I think, therefore, that—and I'd add this one thing about Jennifer's new book. What makes me think it really is a work of philosophy is that there were more questions than answers. And that is a thumbnail definition of what a philosopher is. So, as I say, it's a great honor and pleasure to share the screen with two people that I have great admiration for, Jennifer and Charles. And I look forward to the forthcoming discussion with them. Thank you.

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you, Robert Bernasconi. We'll now turn to Jennifer Morgan.

JENNIFER L. MORGAN: Hello. Thank you so much. And thank you to the Folger for pulling us all together. And Robert, thank you very much for that really lovely hand off to me. I'm really excited about this conversation. I think those of us who are not philosophers, although I will definitely take a compliment that my work approaches a philosophical work, have been really, you know, obviously, I'm sure many people who are watching are very interested in thinking about what we mean by critical race thought, and how we get to that place.

MORGAN: I think that this conversation is going to be very, very informative. I'm going to read, and I'm going to talk just a little bit, I'm going to extract just a little bit from my new book, *Reckoning with Slavery* in order to talk about the way in which I'm thinking about what constitutes political thought. Okay? So, I want to start by sharing my screen so you can see this image. And I'll keep the image up just for a moment, and then I'm going to take it down.

MORGAN: So, somewhere, sometime in the years before 1585 in the town of Bologna, a woman sat for a portrait painted by a man who would become famous. I won't give you his name because it's not important to the story that I'm trying to tell. And I can't tell you hers, although her anonymity is at the very heart of the story that I am trying to tell. As you can see in the portrait, she is dressed well, and she holds an ornate clock that may indicate the kind of wealthy household she was a part of. The painting was damaged, so we do not know who else was in the portrait, only that at one point she was not alone.

MORGAN: She stands behind another figure, one who is almost certainly a woman. Portraits of wealthy families demarcated by lesser members of households there to indicate the status of the family were quite popular in the period. I presume that her

location on the edge of the canvas was precisely that, an indication of how worthy of attention the others in the portrait were. If you look closely at the bodice of her gown, you will see straight pins.

MORGAN: She may or may not have pinned herself into her gown. She may or may not have sewn the dress herself, and the decorative collar that she wears. She may or may not have been a seamstress. She may or may not have been paid for her labor. She may or may not have been free. Hundreds of Africans—now I'm going to stop, so take a last look at her. Hundreds of Africans were enslaved and free in Italy at the end of the 16th century. At the time she was painted, the legality of their enslavability had defined the Mediterranean world for almost 150 years.

MORGAN: But art historians don't know who this woman is. They can't. And so instead, she is referenced rather than named. "Black woman with a clock." "Slave woman with a clock." "African woman with a clock." She marks time with the object that she holds, but she marks so much more with the gaze that holds us. I believe that her visage conveys nothing if not knowing. She knows who she is in relationship to the painter. She knows what she sees. She locks eyes with the viewer and comes close to dismissing you with the turn of her lip.

MORGAN: Dismissing, perhaps, our question as to who she is. When I look at her, I see a woman whose gaze articulates a knowingness that I argue constitutes political thought. It is a gaze that theorizes her own condition, that says, "Look at me and see what brought me here." I see someone who understands her own value, both the value that can't be quantified, and that which can. I see someone with a deep understanding of who and where she is. And still, from this vantage point at the other end of time, both the process of bringing her into place on the canvas in Italy, and the comprehension of her value are very difficult for us to apprehend.

MORGAN: It was that difficulty, that opacity, that first drew me to the project I've recently completed. One that considers the unfolding of early modern capitalism through the prism of women like her. And yet I needed to move away from the kind of earthy loam of social history. There's an association, I think, between enslaved woman and the social-historical that's hard to shake, a presumption that a study of gender and slavery is by default a study of affect, of pain, of resilience. Of the minute pleasures of movement, or coiffure, or beribboned frock.

MORGAN: Of the pain of the effort to protect a child, or the terror of the auction block. The degradation of a mistress's violence, and her chamber pot. The toll taken on the body by the frenzied harvest of sugarcane, the incessant pounding of rice, or the stooped trudge down a row of cotton plants. These are all real, no doubt, but there's something missing from the production of these women in our historical memory. And that is their own comprehension of their position and their role in generating a counternarrative, a theory of political opposition, a refusal of early modern political philosophy.

MORGAN: I'm sorry, not a refusal of early modern political philosophy but an instance of early modern political philosophy. In recent works by David Scott, Neil Roberts, Herman Bennett, Laurent Dubois, Christina Sharpe, and Catherine McKittrick, work that builds on foundational work by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Julia Scott, Hortense Spillers, Cedric Robinson, Saidiya Hartman, their interdisciplinary scholars are forcing historians to grapple with the racial politics of knowledge production.

MORGAN: The endemic problem that locates slaves as victims of violence whose passivity is admittedly, but only occasionally, interrupted by the explosive affect of revolt. My own work builds on these contributions and suggests that by framing the lives of women caught in the early modern machinations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, we can train their political thought onto the question of the origins of race and racial hierarchy.

MORGAN: We might see clarity where historians have typically seen fluidity, and the articulation of theories of power, where historians have typically only seen grief, mother love, and insecurity. The records of the slave trade and of the commerce at its heart are part of a technology of knowledge production that situates trade and racial slavery as rational and that excludes women's lives from the purview of the archive. Their absence is important as it enables a myth whereby slavery is legitimate and not muddied by grieving mothers.

MORGAN: Woman as producers and reproducers have been at the heart of Atlantic slavery from its inception, and because of their capacity to birth the wealth associated with the slave trade, they brought, I have argued, a critical comprehension of the depth of violence embedded in this new idea of hereditary racial slavery. I argue that this clarity of awareness is at the heart of what we currently are thinking about as racial capitalism and that the erasure of these women's critical understanding of what was being wrought through their bodies is a key and profoundly undertheorized aspect of the history of the Black Atlantic, and in the context that we are discussing today, of the history of political philosophy.

MORGAN: So, racial capitalism, of course, is the argument that the roots of capitalism are inextricable from those of slavery, and that the inequities of slavery actually are the fertile ground for the appropriation of value that follows. The gaze of that woman from Bologna, I am convinced, conveys all this and more. It conveys her own awareness of how she is being positioned. And the painter's ability to capture her knowingness is a provocation to all of us to ask what it is precisely that she might know.

MORGAN: And that to me is at the heart of the question of how we think about race and the history of racism, the history of racial hierarchy, and the onset of the early modern and of modernity. So, thank you. And I'm really looking forward to this conversation.

ACHINSTEIN: I'm going to open it up to hear... Thank you so much. These three brilliant presentations. Kind of my head is exploding, and I can hear lines of coherence and convergence and lines of disparateness. And I'm wanting to open it up to the three of you to follow up with each other. Please. We'll have to unmute ourselves for this. So, Charles, I think you were starting in.

MILLS: Yes. Yes. Jennifer, it sounds like a wonderful project and brings home the importance, especially for philosophy, and, Robert, by the way, thanks for that, you know, very generous characterization. I'm wondering, "Do I owe this guy money or something?" I'll explore that later.

MORGAN: I have the same question.

MILLS: Yes. And as Robert emphasized, the whiteness of philosophy remains extreme all these decades later despite so many years of complaint.

MILLS: And one arm of reaction to that is that people interested in these issues, not of course that it's only philosophers of color who work on race, and Robert is a great example of a white philosopher who's made wonderful contributions, but that you have to read a lot of material outside because sometimes really interesting conversations, far more advanced than what's in philosophy itself, are in history, political science, and so forth. So, one of the things I wondered when you were talking, what are the kinds of sources you found as texts?

MILLS: I mean, there was, you know, with the increased interest in 19th-century Black women's contribution to intersectionality and so-forth, there are the well-known figures that everybody cites. But is it the case that there's a whole bunch of lesser-known texts that you've discovered that you've been drawing upon to come up with these conclusions?

MORGAN: No. It's not the discovery of new texts. It's a methodological intervention that says we need to ask the question-so, in the field of history, and certainly in the field of early modern Atlantic slavery studies, comparative slavery, there's been an enormous amount of very generative work about the problem of the archive, the way in which archival evidence does not support the project of doing those kinds of social histories.

MORGAN: Particularly as you move earlier, then the sort of mid-18th century, right? And that remains the case. The archive problem continues to be a problem. But one of the things that I think is really instructive and that connects quite clearly to the question of, like, what counts as political philosophy, Charles, I think it was your point number five. And I apologize 'cause my Internet connection was dropping in and out when both of you were talking. I finally got it fixed, but...

MORGAN: So, what constitutes evidence about the lived experience or the theorizing of their own experiences for early modern and captive African women,

part of what constitutes that experience are the commercial records, right? And so, we have to approach the commercial records, we have to approach the log books of slave ship captains, and the books of sale of governors and legislators in the colonies not just as a place that fails to discuss those women, but sometimes a place where they are discussed, but they are discussed in ways that are hard to find.

MORGAN: So, it's about revisiting a different kind of evidence. Evidence that's primarily been used to write political histories or economic histories of the region, and to ask the question about the presence and impact of both women and men, obviously. But my own interest is primarily with women. So, I think it's really about a shift in one's relational approach to evidence.

BERNASCONI: If I can say, I think that's what's so brilliant about your book. I mean, if you take the grid that I provided, that we start out with a description of lived experience, and then we move through institutional racism, to structural racism, to the systemic racism. And even then, the systemic racism would have to be figured in terms of the system as a whole because racism is only one part of the narrative, that we're dealing with intersectionality.

BERNASCONI: But that you can only understand intersectionality not as the name of a problem, but as something that can render intelligible these issues once you see the whole, and then take it back to the concrete lived experience. And what's brilliant about, I think, what you're proposing here, is that your work is very much evidence based, but this silencing which takes place at the front end, then can be understood from out of the whole.

BERNASCONI: And so that there is something that fills this gap. I mean, I think you only used the word 'dialectical' once in your book, but I was pleased to see it, and to me it is a dialectical enterprise that you're engaged in. And this silence at the beginning, by the end of the book begins to speak because you're relating this individual silencing to the system as a whole.

MORGAN: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's right. Can I turn the questions around, though, and ask, 'cause one of the things, Robert, that you were talking about as you started was, you know, the failure of philosophy to engage questions of race and slavery. So, from my perspective as an historian of slavery who's constantly looking for cross-disciplinary engagement with slavery, you know, I read philosophers who are engaging the history of slavery.

MORGAN: So, I only get that little skim around the edge. And I'd really love to hear both of you, actually, talk a little bit more about where the field is in terms of thinking not only about race, but also about the history of slavery and how enlightenment philosophy kind of emerges from a landscape that is so saturated by hereditary racial slavery, by forced labor. So, where is the field? What are people mulling over these days?

MILLS: What is a problem is that within the Anglo-American tradition, and there is this split—and there's controversy about whether it still exists, but most people think it's still there—Anglo-American analytic versus continental, more historically oriented. Within the Anglo-American tradition of political philosophy, the dominant figure for the past half-century has been John Rawls whose book *A Theory of Justice* came out in 1971. And he said that political philosophy should start off with what he called "ideal theory."

MILLS: And ideal theory is not just normative theory, which we mentioned early, it's a normative theory of a perfectly just society. So, the idea is you get principles of justice of a perfectly just society, and then this is supposed to equip you, theoretically, to go on to sort of deal with principles of justice for unjust societies. And the problem is the transition never really took place. So, at 50 years later, there's still this sort of overwhelming shaping of the Anglo-American analytic tradition by the idea of a perfect just society.

MILLS: Of course, it has its precedent if you go back to, like, you know, Plato and the *Republic*, and so forth. And what this then means is that this then gives the majority of political philosophers, who to repeat are, you know, going to be largely white. This gives them, in a sense, a green light to ignore these issues of racism and slavery. 'Cause the idea is, "Well, we'll get to that later." First of all, the principles of ideal theory, and then at some later stage, a later stage that never arrives, we'll then sort of start talking about the actual history.

MILLS: So, you then are exonerated from, you know, any sense of guilt of not looking at the actual history, because you're doing ideal theory. So, you then get the most ridiculous statements being made by people in this tradition, flagrantly in contradiction with the actual history of racial domination. Which, of course, as you know perfectly well, is the history and continues past slavery. But there's no sense of absurdity, no sense of contradiction, because they're moving in this intellectual world which is constituted by ideality.

MILLS: A sort of intellectual world where it's sort of focusing on this sort of ideal abstraction. And what's important to emphasize is that though philosophy, virtually by definition, deals with abstraction, it doesn't have to be an ideal abstraction. You could sort of develop abstractions as, you know, historians do. How does racial slavery work? How does racial capitalism work? And you develop abstractions that are basically tracking the systems of oppression that, you know, operate, and sort of give us a blueprint of how these things work.

MILLS: But what you get in mainstream Anglo-American political philosophy is this conflation of the ideal and the abstract, so that you're talking about the abstract, and you go straight to the ideal. So, we don't have the detailed theorization of white supremacy, of European settler states, of racial slavery, or all those things that, you know, have so transformed in disciplines like, you know, history, indigenous studies, et cetera, in recent years.

BERNASCONI: I think where a lot of the action is happening is in the study of the history of philosophy. Now, when I was growing up in England and they were training me, it was always about what the philosophers should have said, not what they actually did say, believe it or not. So, they weren't really totally good historians back in those days, but now there's more attention to the actual text and the context. There's been a lot of very good historians and idea, intellectual historians.

BERNASCONI: And so now it's been possible to pose the question about, "Well, what was Locke's attitude towards slavery in reality?" And the same for Kant. Why is it that Kant never speaks out against slavery, whereas everybody else is doing so at the time? And, you know, there are questions about a manuscript that he never published, which looks maybe it was against slavery, but maybe—you know, and so and so forth. Probably it was just against the slave trade, and so and so forth.

BERNASCONI: And so, what we've been dealing with is an idealized Locke and an idealized Kant. And whenever you find any rough edges, we're told they're children of their time. And so, this is why a lot of us have had to get our hands dirty by sort of really getting into the history. Because you still have philosophers who are trading under the name Kant, you know? They say, "Well, I'm a Kantian." Well, that's a bit like saying, "Well, my philosophy, I'm a white guy. So I'm going to do white guy philosophy."

BERNASCONI: And you can't trade under these names without acknowledging a certain complicity about what you're doing. And so, there is movement. And obviously one of the great areas which I hope is going to happen soon is, you know, people like Cugoano are going to become very much part of the canon. That's a brilliant text which is innovative philosophically. It's genuinely philosophically interesting what he says about responsibility.

BERNASCONI: He may be one of the first people in the world to use responsibility as a noun in English, and not many people know that. So, I mean, we are making inroads but it's terribly slow.

MILLS: In that respect, philosophers are jealous of people like you, Jennifer, and in sort of the other humanities, where in some cases these battles were fought years ago. I mean, people are wondering, "Are people still talking about that? Do people still have to make a case for that?" The answer is, in philosophy, yes, you do.

MORGAN: Well, but I would say that there's no question that in history there's been really a wellspring of new work that comes out sort of, I would say, beginning in the 1990s, of kind of careful and in-depth social-historical studies of slavery, and the trade, and the incredible work on the trans-Atlantic slave trade database, et cetera. So, there's a lot of material there.

MORGAN: And what that means is that for scholars like myself who want to ask these questions that sort of, like, we all say this, but I'm standing on the shoulders and the work of so many more studies now in 2021 than I was even in 2003, right? Like, the field has grown tremendously. Like, I think about the impact of Saidiya Hartman, and this notion that we need to consider slavery and its afterlife, right?

MORGAN: Like, that the afterlife of slavery has become an incredibly common, but still incredibly generative and useful way to help us think about this long and tangled history of race, and subjugation, and forced labor, and all that comes afterwards. And I think that we're living in a really powerfully generative moment intellectually in terms of scholarship around the history of slavery.

MORGAN: So, that's very meaningful. Like, it does allow us to then do the work that feels a little bit more precarious, to ask questions that suggest that women who have no names could be thought of as philosophers, or as political theorists, or as people who are developing an analytic about power and race and gender and sexuality as early as, you know 1654, or earlier, right?

MORGAN: So, that feels like there's ground beneath our feet right now that certainly wasn't there, you know, a decade or two ago.

ACHINSTEIN: I wanna throw in a question. This has been so engaging. And this is just something about once failures are recognized-if they are ever fully recognized-once complicity is seen and avowed for, what do we do with these legacies of enlightenment that is the counting, the collection of data, or Kantian notions of autonomy or personhood? What do we do? Obviously, there's a terror right now from the right in terms of cancel culture, and nobody here is talking about that.

ACHINSTEIN: But what's the argument against cancel culture? Not in the sense of canceling Kant, but in the sense that the disciplinary traditions that have created the thinkers that all three of you are have rested upon this history of exclusion, and formation? How do we make sense that systemic racism is part of our own presence here, as taking account of that?

ACHINSTEIN: What do we do with that multiple and multiply complex legacy without canceling it? Or are we looking for ever-better reckonings with it?

MILLS: Well, there's a range of options. There is an option, and sometimes one gets it from one's students, there's a kind of revolution of purity. You discover, let's say, that Kant was a racist and that comes as a big shock. You have zero interest in reading anything by Kant. So you can't say, "Kant was a racist, and I want you to read the *Groundwork* for next week." No, no, no. You have already made it, you know, clear why, you know, we do not want to read the *Groundwork*.

MILLS: So, there's that kind of approach where, you know, there's thought that, you know, if you look back at the history and sort of, you know, pick out all of the racism,

sexism, then you don't read them. Of course, you're not then left with very much left to read. So, there's that approach. There's the sort of mainstream approach, which I hope is getting somewhat less mainstream, which is that you sort of say, and, you know, Robert mentioned, you know, this kind of approach, creatures of their time, unfortunate, let's sort of observe a minute of silence for their sexism and racism, maybe shed a tear or two, put an asterisk or a bracket there, and then continue as before.

MILLS: This is a real interesting thing: and then continue as before. So that acknowledgement makes no difference in terms of the actual understanding of the theorist. So, the challenge, you know, a third way, obviously, is to sort of grapple with the racism and sexism, and then say, "What does it mean for the body of work?" Is it the case that, you know, you can say, "Well, there are these whole sections which are not affected by it, and we [INAUDIBLE] look at those."

MILLS: Is it the case that, you know, you have to face the fact that the racism and sexism are more pervasive than you understood? Is it the case that even though the racism and sexism have this profound shaping effect, you can try to reconstruct, you can try to sort of reimagine a Kant, a Locke, a Hegel, and that, you know, is not sort of in a contaminated way? So, I think, these are interesting questions that are, you know, facing us now in terms of how you deal with this legacy of the past.

MILLS: And, you know, insofar as, you know, you're getting more and more people who are, you know, women, people of color, people interested in issues of post-coloniality, these questions, I think, are not going away. And the challenge then is going sort of around, you know, for us. And if I could put in a minor plug here, I've been asked to guest edit a well-known Kant journal that's going to, I learned, have a special issue on the rubric of radicalizing Kant, with a question mark at the end.

MILLS: And the idea is can you get a radicalized Kant that, you know, is sort of in some sense purified of this, even if we don't want to call him really Kant. He's scare quotes Kant, he's not Kant, actually. There's Kant's dark twin, this is Kant's good twin. The actual Kant is a dark twin, and this guy is a light twin. There's that approach. Or is it the case that we have to face the fact that there's no hope for Kant? So, several scholars have been organized for this.

MILLS: In fact, I had a workshop with them and also one of the editors of the journal this morning, and the ideas people are sort of working on in these papers. So, I think it's going to be a landmark issue, and could possibly, you know, set the example for, you know, treatments of other canonical figures. So, what do you do with Kant, what do you do with Hegel, what do you do with Locke, et cetera, et cetera. I think, you know, that crucial thing is that these issues are put on the agenda, rather than just being shoved under the carpet as they are with the moment of silence, now let's continue as before approach.

BERNASCONI: Well, I want to help Charles out here by giving him the answer to the question. No, there can't be radicalized Kant. You've been trying to sell us on this for years, and I still don't understand what the point of it is. But that doesn't mean not studying Kant. What is really interesting is how can someone be so racist, so sexist, anti-Semitic, too, and still claim to be a cosmopolitan.

BERNASCONI: Now, that to me is really interesting because cosmopolitanism hasn't gone away. And a lot of these cosmopolitans, or cosmopolites, or whatever they call themselves, trade on the Kantian aspect of it. But they want to throw out these other bits. But if there's going to be a cosmopolitanism which is self-reflective, which suspicious of itself, then reading Kant is exactly the starting point you should make.

BERNASCONI: So, I think it makes Kant more interesting once you become honest about Kant. Instead of this constant dishonest—am I really saying this on tape? Apparently. Dishonesty.

MORGAN: No, no. It's just the four of us.

BERNASCONI: Okay. That's fortunate, indeed. I may not be able to show up at the American Philosophical Association again. You know, I mean, this is the problem that I think that we're dealing with. That everybody thinks that it's easy to tear these things away, when what we need to do is really see how these things get interlinked. And that is, again, thinking in terms of the system, the framework. And that's, again, what really understanding what is going on with the Enlightenment. Why is it that the Enlightenment, speaking in terms of universal free reason, is the location for this racist thinking?

BERNASCONI: That it invents a racist thinking. These two things have to be seen as dialectically connected. And until we get to that point, we're just playing little games.

ACHINSTEIN: Jennifer. Yeah.

MORGAN: Yeah. So, for historians, right, for colonial American historians, I mean, Edmund Morgan in *American Slavery, American Freedom* asks the question, why is it that the origin of the most astute American political philosophy about liberty comes from Virginia, where every one of those men are slave holders, or at least the vast majority of them? And so, this is a really old question. It feels related to the conversation that the two of you just had about Kant.

MORGAN: Which is, so, as an historian, I think, Charles, your third option here is to say, "Okay. So, if we fully understand the impact of slavery on, let's just say, on North America, right, and on both the economic and political phenomena that emerge in the 18th century, and we dive into that moment, say, "Okay. So then, what does that mean about our foundational documents, our foundational commitments?"

MORGAN: Is this an example of what you called—I'm sorry, I'm not fluent with this sort of ideal theory.

MILLS: Ideal theory.

MORGAN: Exactly. Is that what this is an example of? Or is it an example of just, like, incredibly hypocritical self-aggrandizing, you know? And I think that that question continues even though it was posed so many years ago. I think that continues to drive some of the new work that's really trying to give voice, and to give comprehension to the violence out of which enslaved people emerged.

MORGAN: Like, literally to grapple, as Jessica Johnson asks us to do, to grapple with the hold. What does it mean to think about emerging from the hold of the slave ship? What does it mean to think about the middle passage as both a process by which something is profoundly left behind, and where something profoundly new is encountered on the other side? And I think that that is a way of digging deeper, like, underneath that layer of, "Okay. So, how do we reconcile the racist, sexist Kant with cosmopolitanism?"

MORGAN: Is it a problem with cosmopolitanism, or is it a problem with Kant? Is it a problem with the people who read Kant? What creates the world in which a person can be a Christian, and a fighter for freedom, and a slave owner, right, and the father of some of his property, right? Like, all of those things together, and I think what I encountered in the classroom is students who want to just simplify the evil of the person who is the slave owner or the slave trader.

MORGAN: And to see that see that as, like, this enormous gap that that kind of behavior, it's so rooted in a past that we couldn't possibly revisit, right, that it absolves the student who says, "Well, we would never do that. We would never pretend that you could own other people." And in fact, we do that all the time. And I think that part of the challenge is to unearth the kind of quotidian mundane ways in which that level of violence coexists with all sorts of contradictory aspirations for freedom and autonomy.

MORGAN: So, you know, that feels like a really crucial set of questions.

BERNASCONI: But I think it's the limitations of analytical thought that it sees these things as identified as contradictions.

BERNASCONI: One of them is extraneous, or one's a hypocrite. The two things necessarily go together. Our conception of freedom comes from the Greeks, which was a slave society. It's not surprising that when the conception of freedom is revived, it again relies on a slave society. When they rediscovered that Aristotle—they weren't reading Aristotle, but when they did round about the 1840s, you know, slave owners in the South started saying, "That's what I'm talking about."

BERNASCONI: What we have to do is another conception of reason. Dialectical reason is a standard way of talking about it. Charles's first book—I think it's your book—is all about dialectics, I mean, it played its role there. And so, I mean, this is why it's a methodological framework.

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you so much. I'm grateful to listen to you all, and I know our listeners are, too. I've got some questions queued up from those who are watching right now. I have a question from the YouTube viewers: Thinking of Dale Turner's work on philosophical struggle between settler state and native nations over sovereignty and the deep ontological differences. Can speakers address the erasures in political philosophy and history of these differences?

MILLS: Well, as I was saying earlier, if you have a discipline that barely even wants to acknowledge race with respect to what was so central to the country: racial slavery, then you can imagine how much more difficult it is to sort of raise the question around race as it has affected indigenous peoples and, you know, their particular perspective. So, the idea of a racial state, as I mentioned which is getting more and more discussion, I mean, not in philosophy, but in other areas. You know, you can raise the [cost?] of a racial state, obviously, and so far as in it's a white settler state, it's going to be a racial state.

MILLS: It's privileging those who have arrived, those who have invaded, those who have conquered against those who are native. But you won't find this being a question in mainstream political philosophy. And there's a phrase that you find in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* which I've often cited 'cause in a sense it sort of sums things up so nicely. Rawls says we should think of society a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, in which the rules are basically designed to benefit everybody.

MILLS: Now ask yourself, how could that possibly be an accurate characterization of the United States? I mean, it's just ridiculous. And it's not the case that the rules were designed to benefit indigenous peoples or African slaves. Nonetheless, this is how John Rawls says we should think of society. So, in terms of one of the points I mentioned, the racialization—I'm sorry. Problem with the phone here. In terms of the racialization of the discourse, this is an example of it.

MILLS: Nowhere in Rawls's work are you going to find deprecatory comments about African-Americans, about Native Americans. You won't find anything negative about Native Americans because they don't appear at all in the 2,000 pages of his five books. But apart from that exclusion, once you characterize society in this way, or say if you think of society in this way, that's a racialized conception.

MILLS: You're basically taking up the perspective of the European settler population. And it then means that your whole discourse is going to be shaped by this way of looking at things. And the peculiar political problems that arise for this population are not for those subordinated by this population. So, the answer to your

question is these are people who don't even want to admit racial slavery as a central political reality, let alone indigenous conquest.

BERNASCONI: Yeah. I mean, just to add to that, the ideology of settler colonialism is expounded by John Locke in the *Second Treatise*. If you read Samuel Stanhope Smith's lectures on moral philosophy, published at the beginning of the 19th century, he was president of—was it Princeton? I think so. One of these important colleges that never invite me to go and speak there. Where did that come from? He's repeating the same ideas.

BERNASCONI: And so, it's no surprise that within a few years you get Indian removal.

MORGAN: I think it's also significant that, you know, again, there's a lot of work right now on the part of historians of the early 19th, 18th, and 17th century, who are talking about the interconnection between settler colonialism, the dismantling of indigenous land claims, and hereditary racial slavery of people of African descent, as those are being interlocked. I don't want to hazard a guess as to where the field sees the originary studies of that.

MORGAN: But from my perspective, the work of Sylvia Winter to think about, you know, 1492 and the pre-Enlightenment presumptions about the legitimacy to land claims, and the legitimacy to extrapolate wealth from the Americas, that these things have always been interconnected. So, what's interesting to me now is that historians, I think, are revisiting that landscape a lot, to talk about the connection between sovereignty and the erasure of sovereignty alongside of the racial state.

MORGAN: Racial as in race, not as in erasure. Those two are connected, though, clearly.

ACHINSTEIN: I have another question from the chat. We only have a few more minutes, so we'll kinda go quickly. Jumping off from the acknowledgement that the field of British political thought has been slow to take on board acknowledgement of race, slavery and enslavement, racism, and so on. And the kinds of new thinking that this conversation is generating, the forms of political thought that Jennifer Morgan's looking for in moments of reticence, for example.

ACHINSTEIN: What possible futures can we imagine for the study, that you're imagining? And I'm going to pin on another question to that, which is what advice for graduate students who are in a disenfranchised and more vulnerable position in the structural hierarchies of the academy for pushing this forward and building the future that is more inclusive in the so many ways that this panel has wanted it to be?

MILLS: [INAUDIBLE] I'm sorry. Robert?

ACHINSTEIN: I'd like one of you two to start us off since the question is originally about the field of political thought.

BERNASCONI: Okay. Well, in terms of political thought, the quick answer is there are even fewer continental philosophers in the U.K. than there are in the United States. So, of course nobody's going to be dealing with the history and dealing with these complex issues. They're trapped in their idiom in the way Charles describes the Rawlsians being trapped in their idiom. It's going to require a revolution in the way one does philosophy, an historical turn, as I like to call it, for these issues to be addressed.

BERNASCONI: And yes, I think it's really difficult for graduate students right now. But if you just have to look and see how many jobs there were in critical philosophy of race this past year, you can see that there is an anxiety in philosophy departments that they know they need to address these questions if they're going to have any undergraduate students at all.

MORGAN: I would just add that, you know, there was a moment when I talked about the disciplinary location of studies of women in slavery as being primarily in social history, right? What is lacking in the discipline of history is an understanding of slavery and enslavement, and racism and race as a crucial part of intellectual history, and the history of ideas.

MORGAN: And I do think that there, again, is a turn in that aspect of the field, of the historical profession, a willingness to take on the history of racial ideology. And that's certainly, again, a place where there's a lot of interdisciplinary work, work by historians who are reading in philosophy, who are reading in political economy, who are reading in literary studies, and in religion, histories of religion, et cetera. So, there's a kind of excitement there, I think, and a push in areas that have been very, you know, hostile in the past.

MORGAN: The Renaissance studies, Medieval and Early Modern studies, as places where, "Okay. Now we actually do have to take on questions of race and racism, enslavement, et cetera." So, I think that is also a place of intellectual growth.

ACHINSTEIN: Charles, did you want to...

MILLS: Well, just going back to the original question. And Robert had touched on this, it is really very difficult for contemporary graduate students, I mean, all of us are full professors, you know, with the security that comes with that. But in a terrible job market, you know, terrible even before recent events, you can be vulnerable in so many ways. I've been really impressed by the number of sort of solidarity declarations grad students have made with Black Lives Matter.

MILLS: In terms of making demands of their home institutions to change the curriculum, hire more people of color, bring more voices from these marginalized

sections onto the syllabus, and so forth. But in terms of the individual as against, you know, the grad students as a whole organizing, I think it's going to be really very difficult for them. And, I mean, the burden should really be carried by senior people like ourselves. I mean, we have to hope that we make sufficient of a difference at our level that it creates an opening for them, those who are doing non-standard stuff.

MILLS: And Robert's point is key. If it can be shown that there's a payoff in the sense that, you know, people would come to these classes, and they're less likely to come to those classes, then maybe for that unprincipled reason, you can hope to get more material on race and these kinds of issues that you currently have.

ACHINSTEIN: Thank you so much.

WILLIAMS: Yes, thank you. It's been an amazing conversation that we in the audience have been so privileged to eavesdrop on. You know, these great thinkers today wrestling with the conundrums that cross their disciplines. Thank you so much again for this. A special thanks also goes to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their support of this series. I'd like to extend my gratitude to our audience. Should you be in a position to contribute to programs like this one, we at the Folger Shakespeare Library would be grateful. Our institution was founded on philanthropy, and your support will help us continue funding programs for so many different audiences.

WILLIAMS: These include K-12 educators and their students who are served by the Folger Education Division, those who attend the award-winning productions of the Folger Theatre, and the scholars we host at the Folger Institute through fellowships and programming like this one. Again, thank you all. And we invite you to revisit this and previous sessions in the Critical Race Conversations series on the Folger YouTube channel website. Please stay safe and stay in touch. Thank you all very much.

MILLS: Thanks for the invitation, guys.

MORGAN: Thank you.

BERNASCONI: Thank you.

MILLS: Keep up the good work.