

Book Review | *Infrahumanisms: Science, culture, and the making of modern non/personhood* by Megan H. Glick (Duke University Press, 2018)

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Megan H. Glick's *Infrahumanisms* recovers this term—used by primatologist Robert Yerkes to refer to “‘almost’ or ‘near’ human” (p. 3) primates—to interrogate a history through which the category of the human has functioned as a biopolitical technology of differentiation rooted in colonial and racist logics. Focusing particularly on the discourse of species and the animal/human boundary, Glick argues that the invention of the human as an ontological category and a rights-bearing subject was always and necessarily accompanied by the entwined production of “marginalized non/personhood” (p. 4). Glick thus offers a complementary theorization to Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) that, using political and economic histories, explores how the European “universal” citizen-human emerged through the denial of this status to those deemed mere labor-power in the colonies. Glick covers a different temporal frame and focuses on scientific frameworks and institutions but arrives at the same conclusion: understood via its history of emergence, “the human” is a necessarily racially exclusive category, a concept perhaps beyond salvage for the politics of social justice.

Rather than a strictly linear or chronological account, Glick focuses on specific strategic uses of the nonhuman/human boundary in three historical moments,

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which correspond to the three parts of her book: (1) Bioexpansionism, 1900s–1930s, characterized by the simultaneous emergence of techniques of biological governance and new scientific categories of biological meaning; (2) Extraterrestriality, 1940s–1970s, which examines how notions of life and indigeneity were shaped by discourses of space programs; and (3) Interiority, 1980s–2010s, which focuses on how reified ideas about race and national identity are invented in discourses of new corporeal knowledges. Her case studies are chosen as moments in which these discourses “rose to national consciousness,” rather than looking at them after “they became fully institutionalized” (p. 19), thus bringing into view other contingent paths through which the history of humanization (which has also been one of dehumanization) might have proceeded.

In this work, Glick joins a number of scholars in critical race studies such as Neel Ahuja and Alexander Weheliye, as she notes, who reject an aspirational politics based on inclusion in the category of “universal personhood” and seek instead to expose that this concept is irrecoverably tainted by a history of racialized exclusion. In Glick’s words, her specific contribution to this discourse is to show the infrahuman as “humanism’s shadow Other, the very thing that bolsters the strategic use of the human as a positivist strategy” (p. 10). While earlier work in the field often began from situations in which some people were formally stripped of the legal status as human or other kinds of political rights, Glick argues that we need to understand in a more comprehensive way that “the human” always produces the devalued cultural category of the infrahuman, attached to pejorative notions of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disease status, or ability. While she distances herself from the field of human-animal studies, she asserts, “this book is interested in the welfare and rights of all living beings” (p. 15), while at the same time rejecting rhetorical comparisons that conflate marginalized humans with animals as exploited beings. Similarly, she is wary of intersectional approaches to oppression: for her, they cede too much ground to categories of comparison as always-already formed. Instead, scholars should “rethink biological meaning and difference” (p. 18) by interrogating how and why specific categorizations arose in particular historical contexts.

Throughout the book, Glick engages with scientific discourses contemporary to the period under examination. The gaps in time between the three periods and the shift among scientific discourses across the sections—primatology in Part I, radiation and exobiology in Part II, AIDS and xenotransplantation in Part III—makes this work less integrated as a single volume than would be ideal, but the

trade-off that comes from a lack of sustained focus on a single period of history or body of scientific knowledge is the fact that Glick demonstrates the pervasive way that the discourse of species enables racial bias to persist in new bodies of knowledge. The scholarly discussions in both human-animal studies and posthuman theory have been insufficiently attentive to race and colonial histories, and Glick's work is a welcome addition to these conversations, showing gaps in previous ways of thinking about the ideological functions of the animal/human boundary.

At the same time, however, I found myself wishing that the book had engaged more thoroughly with scholarship from these fields: Glick expresses some suspicion of these discourses, which is understandable given that much of this work has been myopic about questions of race, and she notes the often-expressed suspicious timing such that "the human" and "the subject" both came to be questioned in Western cultures just as previously excluded peoples were beginning to lay claim to them. While not wanting to minimize the truth of this insight, I feel that this book misses an opportunity to find common cause with scholars who are similarly interested in deconstructing the historical and political work done by the category "the human." Glick's work is valuable, and she offers a new way to think outside of "the human" with an attention to racialization that is urgently needed, and so my critique here is minor: I merely question the value of inventing another term rather than complicating and thus improving an ongoing conversation about deconstructing "the human." Glick links the use of the term posthuman to Francis Fukuyama's reactionary defense of putatively universalist notions of human rights and dignity in his 2002 *Our Posthuman Future*, a very narrow sense of the field.

The power of Glick's approach is evident in the novel connections she makes by keeping the dual operation of humanization/dehumanization (or, as she prefers, universal personhood and marginalized non/personhood) always simultaneously in view. In Part I's investigation of primatology, for example, she reads photographs from Yerkes's archive to show how his distinct framing of chimpanzees within domestic settings and gorillas within institutional ones reinforced not only how contemporary science differentiated these primates but also how this knowledge mapped onto colonial discourse of race. Primatology and colonial discourses of global hierarchy entwine to produce the gorillas as a "Black" or African primitive being, while the chimpanzee was understood to be "white," and, indeed, was anthropomorphized as more "a person" than were the human inhabitants of Africa. Part II offers an original reading of the gray aliens of 1950s

UFO legend as similarly racialized subjects, arguing that this specific way of envisioning the alien is “deeply tied to the panic over Holocaust photography” (p. 87). Putting the accounts of Roswell aliens into dialogue with the Cold War history of nuclear testing on animals, contamination of tribal lands, and the bombing of Japanese civilians at the end of the Second World War, Glick reads these aliens as a haunting reminder of the traumatic violence perpetrated by the United States in that conflict, a violence that could not be publicly acknowledge as such. Under the guise of medical aid, the United States used Japanese survivors of the nuclear bombs as test subjects for new techniques of reconstructive surgery, noting that “many Japanese citizens protested that they were treated like ‘guinea pigs’ rather than given proper medical care” (p. 97). What is most intriguing about this section is its second chapter on discourses of exobiology, where Glick cogently makes the case that the Cold War geopolitical rhetoric of First, Second, and Third Worlds mapped onto popular discourses through which the immigration term *alien* was beginning to be applied to extraterrestrials, and thereby “not only dehumanized certain nations in the sociopolitical sense so well understood; it literally placed them outside the confines of human life” (p. 116).

The book’s final section is the most uneven, but also points to the book’s great value for guiding future work at the intersections of science and technology studies, biological sciences, and critical race studies. Like the previous two sections, it consists of two chapters, each with a different case study: one on AIDS discourse and the speciesism rhetoric of zoonotic diseases, and a second on xenotransplantation and cultural discourse about pigs. Although all chapters have demonstrated a remarkable range of rhetorical connections (exobiology linked to medical imaging techniques that transform women’s bodies into maternal universes linked to *Roe v. Wade*, as one example), the connections concerning the discussion of pigs seems the least thought through. The range of examples are there—pigs as figures of obesity, negative stereotypes that deem pigs lazy or dirty, Muslim culture’s avoidance of pork, pigs in children’s texts, and of course the pig as a genetically manipulated source of “spare” organs, the racialized culture of organ donation—but the rhetorical resonances among them are not as clearly articulated as they could be. What exactly does the pig signify in this history of not-quite-human others and othering? An answer never quite emerges. This may be in fact because, as her conclusion explores, we are at a moment when “new ideologies of biological difference are on the horizon” (p. 195). As this final chapter hints, the pig symbolizes capital’s desire to use all parts of any body—human, animal, or chimera—for its own ends. As further research interrogates this now more widely shared vulnerability of the body to commodification and

depersonalization, it is imperative that we do not forget how marginalized and colonized peoples have already long been exploited in these ways. Glick's essential book exemplifies the kind of scholarship we need to face this brave new world.

Author Bio

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