

Winner

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson

Title

Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World (New York University Press, 2020).

Citation

A philosophically daring reimagination of anti-Blackness and its production of human others, *Becoming Human: Meaning and Matter in an Antiblack World* synthesizes interventions into multiple domains of recent critical theory and repositions a centuries-long history of Black diasporic creative production by articulating the limits of humanist and other recognition-based understandings of that history. In readings of the work of Octavia Butler, Frederick Douglass, Nalo Hopkinson, Ezrom Legae, Audre Lorde, Wangechi Mutu, and Toni Morrison, among others, this study develops a powerful account of the recursive and autopoietic dynamics of racialization and bestialization, gendering, and maternalization through which the European Enlightenment constructed both Blackness and whiteness. Jackson teaches us to attend not simply to Black struggles for recognition as fully human, and hence subjects of human rights, but to an alternative project that undoes the category of the human by lingering in its insufficiencies as a biopolitical framework. Rather, this book mines the inventive ways that the hoary split between human and animal at the core of Western discourse is upset when Black artists engage in improvisations across modes of being, reproduction, and being-with. Fully conversant with studies in natural history, gender and sexuality, and philosophy, this work roves across textual and visual genres in a richly comparative vein. At the same time, *Becoming Human: Meaning and Matter in an Antiblack World* rearticulates and expands a tradition of Black expressive ontological and materialist thought that generated viable alternatives to the European Enlightenment project.