ESCLAVAGES & POST~ESCLAVAGES
SLAVERIES & POST~SLAVERIES

Call for contributions to a special number

"Racial Uplift and Political Struggles in Slave and Post-Slave Societies"

No. 17 of the journal, May 2028
Esclavages & Post~Esclavages / Slaveries & Post~Slaveries

Coordination

Audrey Célestine, New-York University

Nicolas Martin-Breteau, Université de Lille

Deadline for the submission of the summaries: December 1, 2026
Deadline for the submission of the articles: May 2, 2027
Deadline for final version of the articles: December 2027
Issue Publication: May 2028

Dear colleagues,

The journal *Slaveries & Post-Slaveries* is pleased to share with you the call for contributions for issue 17 (Spring 2018), whose provisional title is "Racial Uplift and Political Struggles in Slave and Post-Slave Societies." You will find the full text of the call below and attached, in both French and English.

Proposals for article abstracts, with a maximum length of 5,000 characters (excluding bibliography), should also include your name and institutional affiliation, as well as a short biographical and bibliographical note. They should be sent to the journal's editorial committee (ciresc.redaction@cnrs.fr) by December 1, 2026. The detailed schedule can be found in the text of the call.

Please feel free to circulate this call widely among your networks.

We thank you in advance for your contributions.

Theme of this Issue

What the English language refers to as racial uplift may be translated into French as "élévation de la race." Without always designating exactly the same thing, related notions include respectability politics (Higginbotham 1993), racial advancement, racial reform or moral reform, self-help, and even uplift suasion (Kendi 2016). These political ideologies share a

common objective: promoting the improvement or advancement of a racialized—and therefore stigmatized—group through a set of practices aimed at resisting racial oppression by elevating both the self and the group in an upward movement toward racial equality and democratic justice (Gaines 1996).

Generally speaking, ideologies of racial uplift propose a dual strategy (Martin-Breteau 2024). Internally, within the community, they seek to strengthen self-esteem and racial pride, and more broadly self-confidence, as a means of protecting individuals from the abjection imposed by the social order. The goal is to transform the negative dispositions internalized through contact with a violently hostile society, and to build the inner confidence necessary to overcome social contempt, encourage courageous action, and achieve justice. In this first sense, racial uplift constitutes a politics of dignity. Externally, beyond the community, ideologies of racial uplift aim to overturn racial "prejudices," that is, the degrading representations that the dominant group—most often racialized as white—maintains about those considered nonwhite. From this perspective, racial uplift constitutes a symbolic struggle for recognition (Honneth 1995; Lamont 2023), seeking to impose positive representations of nonwhite people against the falsehoods of dominant social representations. In this second sense, racial uplift constitutes a politics of truth.

From a historical perspective, the various ideologies of racial uplift thus developed through a dual movement of social protection and political protest. Contrary to a widespread assumption, they did not emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, these ideologies appear to have been systematized at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within the framework of the slave institution, particularly in the United States and the Caribbean (Cooper 1972; Gaines 1993; Rael 2002). In the United States, these ideologies exerted their greatest influence during periods of intensified racial oppression: at the height of racial slavery (1830–1860) and, following abolition in 1865, during the establishment of racial segregation (1880–1920) (Brooks 2017). Nevertheless, they remain relevant today (Blume Oeur 2018).

Geographically speaking, tactics of racial uplift have been studied most extensively in the context of U.S. society—a disproportion in scholarly production that may suggest their marginality elsewhere. Yet in the Caribbean, these ideologies also took shape as more or less systematized tactics in the form of what McGraw calls "recognition work." Indeed, these ideologies and practices of self-elevation circulated throughout the Black Atlantic and beyond. The circulation of the values and ideas of the Haitian Revolution, for example, contributed to the diffusion of certain forms of racial uplift (Byrd 2019; Alexander 2022). Likewise, the Universal Negro Improvement Association founded by Marcus Garvey, originally from Jamaica, became the largest Black political organization of the early twentieth century, with a

presence throughout the Atlantic world and an ambition centered on Black "improvement" (Stephens & Ewing 2026).

From a sociological perspective, finally, ideologies of racial uplift were initially promoted by the political, economic, and cultural elites of the Black world, who sought to "guide" their communities along the path toward equality and justice. Those whom W. E. B. Du Bois called the Talented Tenth (Du Bois), and who have also been described as "aristocrats of color" (Gatewood 1990), were in fact the leading advocates of these "equalization strategies" (Lamont & Fleming 2005) between Black and white elites. In the Caribbean, these movements are sometimes referred to as elite reform or middle-class nationalism. Within the framework of the nineteenth-century reform movement in the English-speaking Atlantic world, Black women and their political organizations played a central role in promoting these ideologies (Giddings 1984; Higginbotham 1993; Wolcott 1997; 2001; Parker 2016; Cooper 2017; Pavlevitch 2022). Until today, these ideologies have concerned not only Black people but also other racialized groups, including populations perceived as Arab/Muslim or Asian (Jun 2011; Dazey 2021b).

These ideologies sought to improve the collective condition of the community through social practices aimed at a threefold moral, intellectual, and physical perfection. They proposed an ideal of excellence encouraging individuals to better themselves along these three dimensions through forms of "practice" and "care of the self" (Foucault 2001). As a result, religion (Wheeler 1986; Miller 2003), education (Edmondson 2009; Schenbeck 2012), and self-presentation were probably the three most important domains of social activity for uplifters. The use of photography (Wallace & Smith 2012), clothing (Miller 2009; Miller *et al.* 2025), cosmetics (Gill 2010), and sport (Martin-Breteau 2024) all served as means of promoting new forms of self-presentation. Economic success could itself be presented as proof of the triple perfection expected of members of the community (Weber 1958). Media outlets, especially the press (Fultz 1995; Anderson 2015; Haywood 2018), served as powerful vehicles for these political tactics.

These ideologies were vigorously criticized, particularly during the eras of the Black Power movement and Black Lives Matter (Frazier 1957; Kendi 2016; Taylor 2016; Malcolm 2022). Far from constituting a politics of emancipation, the pursuit of "respectability" associated with ideologies of racial uplift has been described as a set of bourgeois, paternalistic, conservative, authoritarian, or even reactionary political tactics—which consequently are relatively understudied in the social sciences despite their historical and sociological importance (Rhodes & Joseph 2016). The main criticism holds that racial uplift ignores the sociological, rather than psychological, origins of racial inequality: the prejudices of dominant groups are not the causes but the consequences of racial oppression, which relativizes—or even nullifies—any strategy of liberation based on moral persuasion. Ideologies of racial uplift have

also been criticized for their inability to subvert dominant white norms. Since they require the oppressed to prove their humanity in order to obtain equality, they condition justice upon a standard of excellence that is often unattainable. Moreover, this demand contributes to the extension of dominant norms, thereby intensifying relations of domination over the most vulnerable members of stigmatized communities (Lopez Bunyasi & Smith 2019).

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that racial uplift was not a political tactic defended solely by conservative or bourgeois groups. Even in the 1950s-1970s United States, racial uplift was adopted in different forms as a tactic of resistance and survival within a racist society, both by activists in the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and by followers of the Nation of Islam (Curtis 2002; Matlin 2006). Although they favored different, if not opposing, political tactics, the lives and actions of W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington (Moore 2003), as well as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., were largely structured around this perfectionist demand for self-elevation. Reading their autobiographies reveals the same determination to elevate themselves in order to protect themselves from racist violence and, insofar as possible, eradicate it (Washington 1901; Malcolm X 1999). The reason is that racial uplift did not primarily seek to imitate or flatter the white majority in order to persuade it of its mistaken judgments about nonwhite people; rather, it sought to strengthen what Toni Morrison called the self-regard of Black people—that is, their self-love, understood as a prerequisite for any struggle for liberation.

This special issue therefore aims to propose a historical and geographical genealogy of the ideologies and practices of racial uplift. Rather than portraying the various forms of racial uplift as either heroic or naive, the objective is to analyze, in a methodical and contextualized manner, their intrinsic ambivalence as sets of practices simultaneously adapting to and contesting the established social and racial order (Dazey 2021a; Martin-Breteau 2024). These tactics could thus both challenge and reinforce dominant norms. Although central to the contemporary history of struggles for racial liberation, these ideologies remain relatively understudied in their historical and geographical coherence beyond the United States and even beyond the English-speaking world.

Themes

Contributions may in particular address the following issues:

- The question of distinctions and hierarchies of class, gender, age, nationality, etc., among both the promoters and the intended recipients of ideologies of racial uplift. Were those advocating racial uplift merely “elites”? Or can one also identify a powerful lineage of these ideologies and practices within the working classes themselves? What forms did they take in those contexts? What were the specific characteristics of racial

uplift when promoted by women? To what extent were majority groups themselves concerned with forms of racial uplift, as in what has been called white uplift (Newman 2012; Spahn 2024)?

- The question of the highly diverse modalities of racial uplift tactics, grounded in an ethic of excellence supporting a range of practices of dignity and truth. In what sense can Black excellence—and more broadly subaltern excellence—historically be understood as a form of resistance? In which domains of social activity did this tactic develop most specifically, and why? Did these tactics not almost always combine a threefold aspiration toward moral, intellectual, and physical excellence? If not, why?
- The question of the political effectiveness of tactics of racial uplift. Racial uplift is indeed widely regarded as a conservative political tactic. Yet the elevation of the self and the group remains a central framework for forms of primary and secondary socialization aimed at resisting racial abjection and oppression. Why, despite often justified criticisms, does this tactic remain relevant today? Do these tactics consist solely of symbolic and moral struggles for recognition? Do they not also seek the redistribution of economic and political power? Does the theoretical distinction between these two paradigms truly make sense?

We welcome original contributions to scholarly research on ideologies of racial uplift in slave and post-slave societies from the late eighteenth century onward, and that engage with the themes of this call. As *Slaveries & Post-Slaveries* is an interdisciplinary journal, contributions may draw upon one or more fields within the social sciences (history, sociology, political science, ethnography, etc.).

Submission Procedures

Proposals for article abstracts (in French or English), with a maximum length of 5,000 characters (excluding bibliography), should also include your name and institutional affiliation, as well as a short biographical and bibliographical note. They should be sent to the journal's editorial committee (ciresc.redaction@cnrs.fr) by December 1, 2026. Feedback on proposals will be provided by January 15, 2027.

Completed articles, of approximately **45,000 characters** (including notes and spaces), should be submitted by May 3, 2027. Each article will undergo anonymous peer review by a member of the editorial board and by an external reviewer. Final versions of accepted articles must be completed by December 2027.

Practical guidelines for authors are available here: https://journals.openedition.org/slaveries/2173?file=1

Publication of issue 17 of the journal *Slaveries & Post-Slaveries*: Spring 2028.

Bibliography

ALEXANDER Leslie M., 2022. *Fear of a Black Republic. Haiti and the Birth of Black Internationalism in the United States*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

ANDERSON Mia L., 2015. "'I Dig You, Chocolate City': Ebony and Sepia Magazines' Coverage of Black Political Progress, 1971–1977," *Journal of African American Studies*, no. 19/4, pp. 398–409.

BLUME OEUR Freeden, 2018. *Black Boys Apart. Racial Uplift and Respectability in All-Male Public Schools*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

BROOKS Clayton McClure, 2017. *The Uplift Generation. Cooperation across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.

BYRD Brandon R., 2019. *The Black Republic. African Americans and the Fate of Haiti*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

COOPER Britney C., 2017. *Beyond Respectability. The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

COOPER Frederick, 1972. "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827–50," *American Quarterly*, no. 24/5, pp. 604–625.

CURTIS Edward E., 2002. "Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Power in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, no. 12/2, pp. 167–196.

DAZEY Margot, 2021a. "Rethinking Respectability Politics," *British Journal of Sociology*, no. 72/3, pp. 580–593.

DAZEY Margot, 2021b. "Polite Responses to Stigmatization: Ethics of Exemplarity among French Muslim Elites," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, no. 46/4, pp. 686–706.

DU BOIS, W. E. B., 1903. "The Talented Tenth," in Booker T. Washington (ed.), *The Negro Problem*, New York, James Pott & Compan, pp. 33–75.

EDMONDSON Belinda, 2009. *Caribbean Middlebrow. Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

FOUCAULT Michel, 2001. *L'Herméneutique du sujet*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil.

FRAZIER E. Franklin, 1957. *Black Bourgeoisie*, Glencoe, Free Press.

FULTZ Michael, 1995. "'The Morning Cometh': African American Periodicals, Education and the Black Middle Class, 1900–1930," *Journal of Negro History*, no. 80/3, pp. 97–112.

GAINES Kevin K., 1993. "Black Americans' Racial Uplift Ideology as 'Civilizing Mission': Pauline E. Hopkins on Race and Imperialism," in Amy Kaplan & Donald E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham, Duke University Press, pp. 433–455.

GAINES Kevin K., 1996. *Uplifting the Race. Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

GATEWOOD Willard B., 1990. *Aristocrats of Color. The Black Elite, 1880–1920*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

GIDDINGS Paula, 1984. *When and Where I Enter. The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, New York, William Morrow.

GILL Tiffany M., 2010. *Beauty Shop Politics. African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry,* Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

HAYWOOD D'Weston, 2018. *Let Us Make Men. The Twentieth-Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement,* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press.

HIGGINBOTHAM Evelyn Brooks, 1993. *Righteous Discontent. The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

HONNETH Axel, 1995. *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

JUN Helen Heran, 2011. *Race for Citizenship. Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America,* New York, New York University Press.

KENDI Ibram X, 2016. *Stamped from the Beginning. The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America,* New York, Nation Books.

LAMONT Michèle, 2023. *Seeing Others. How Recognition Works—and How It Can Heal a Divided World*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

LAMONT Michèle & Crystal FLEMING, 2005. "Everyday Antiracism: Competence and Religion in the Cultural Repertoire of the African American Elite," *Du Bois Review*, no. 2/1, pp. 29–43.

LOPEZ BUNYASI Tehama & Candis Watts SMITH, 2019. "Do All Black Lives Matter Equally to Black People? Respectability Politics and the Limitations of Linked Fate," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, no. 4/1, pp. 180–215.

MALCOLM Nigel I., 2022. *Rethinking Racial Uplift. Rhetorics of Black Unity and Disunity in the Obama Era*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi.

MALCOLM X & Alex HALEY, 1999 [1965]. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, New York, Ballantine Books.

MATLIN Daniel, 2006. "'Lift Up Yr Self!' Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition," *Journal of American History*, no. 93/1, pp. 91–116.

MARTIN-BRETEAU Nicolas, 2024. *Frontline Bodies. Sports and Black Struggles for Justice since the Late Nineteenth Century*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.

MCGRAW Jason, 2014. *The Work of Recognition. Caribbean Colombia and the Postemancipation Struggle for Citizenship*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

MILLER Albert G., 2003. *Elevating the Race. Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865–1924*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press.

MILLER Monica L. *et al.*, 2025. *Superfine. Tailoring Black Style*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

MILLER Monica L., 2009. *Slaves to Fashion. Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, Durham, Duke University Press.

MOORE Jacqueline M., 2003. *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*, Wilmington, Scholarly Resources.

NEWMAN Richard, 2012. "Good Communications Corrects Bad Manners: The Banneker-Jefferson Dialogue and the Project of White Uplift," in John Craig Hammond & Matthew Mason (eds.), *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, pp. 69–93.

PARKER Jeffrey W., 2016. "Sex at a Crossroads: The Gender Politics of Racial Uplift and Afro-Caribbean Activism in Panama, 1918–32," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*, no. 4/2, pp. 196–221.

PAVLETICH JoAnn (ed.), 2022. *Yours for Humanity. New Essays on Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, Athens, University of Georgia Press.

RAEL Patrick, 2002. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

RHODES Jane & Ralina L. JOSEPH, 2016. "African American Representation and the Politics of Respectability," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, n^{os} 18/2-4.

SCHENBECK Lawrence, 2012. *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1943*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi.

SPAHN Hannah, 2024. *Black Reason, White Feeling. The Jeffersonian Enlightenment in the African American Tradition*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.

STEPHENS Ronald J. & Adam EWING (eds), 2019. *Global Garveyism*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida.

DOI : 10.5744/florida/9780813056210.001.0001

TAYLOR Keeanga-Yamahtta, 2016. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation. Racism and Civil Rights*, Chicago, Haymarket Books.

WALLACE Maurice O. & Shawn Michelle SMITH (eds.), 2012. *Pictures and Progress. Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, Durham, Duke University Press.

WASHINGTON Booker T., 1901. *Up from Slavery*, New York, Doubleday, Page & Co.

WHEELER Edward, 1986. *Uplifting the Race. The Black Minister in the New South, 1865–1902*, Lanham, University Press of America.

WEBER Max, 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, traduit de l'allemand par Talcott Parsons, New York, Scribner.

WOLCOTT Victoria W., 2001. *Remaking Respectability. African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

WOLCOTT Victoria W., 1997. "'Bible, Bath and Broom': Nannie Helen Burroughs's National Training School and African-American Racial Uplift," *Journal of Women's History*, no. 9/1, pp. 88–110.