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In a capitalist country, freedom is always deceptive, but even the appearance of democracy itself is fading from day to day, and from day to day despotism breaks out with increasing impudence.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*

Introduction

In 1947, Simone de Beauvoir traveled to the United States for a four-month stay, during which she toured the country extensively, giving numerous lectures, and penning her observations of the country defining the post-World War II social and political landscape. Her copious notes taken during this time eventually became the travelogue, *America Day by Day* (*L'Amérique au jour le jour*) as well as a piece written for the May 25, 1947 edition of the *New York Times Magazine*, “An Existentialist Looks at Americans.” In both of these writings, Beauvoir offers an astute and penetrating criticism of American culture from a foreign viewpoint. Although she admits that she is an outsider looking in, she also grants that the position of the outsider (as she demonstrates in *The Second Sex*, 1949) provides a unique perspective for critique of dominant power structures and social mores.

Beauvoir’s interpretation of American culture never purports to be anything more than a limited view. She does not promise a “serious study” but rather a “faithful account” that is only a collection of “indecisions, additions, and corrections” that do not claim anything definitive.¹ While it is a bit disingenuous to deny the gravity of certain passages (such as those on American abstraction and race), Beauvoir is clearly not purporting to write a work of serious literature or philosophical theory. Thus, it is important to read many of her observations on the United States as a first-person experiential account that also presents ethical, political, and philosophical subject matter.

These observations are more of an expression of the “art of living,” which does not approach problems with absolute rules but, as Karen Vintges notes, shows life and ethics always in creation.² In this light, Beauvoir writes mostly about how interactions affect her, the thoughts they engender, and the way in which a foreign country, language, and culture reveal themselves to her. In short, she offers a phenomenological account that opens up to philosophical critique, but that does not, in itself, profess to be a work of philosophy.

The most philosophically rich discussions occur in what Beauvoir repeatedly refers to as American “abstraction” and the undeniable presence of racial discrimination and oppression. This paper explores Beauvoir’s treatment of American abstraction and race with three goals in mind: first, to understand the American relationship to time and money as abstractions. Ignoring the past and projecting an idealistic (but ultimately vacuous) future, leads to a strange kind of fatalism and lack of passion that profoundly impacts White and Black Americans, albeit in distinctively different ways. While Beauvoir would argue that there is a human tendency toward flight into abstraction as a way of avoiding the demands of action, there is something unique in how Americans undertake this flight. The second goal is to explore these differences through an analysis of how White Americans attempt to live with “good” consciences through the positing of and attachment to abstract values and things. This attitude, in turn, produces a largely instrumental and racist treatment of many populations, in particular Black Americans. The final goal focuses on how Beauvoir confronts the fact of her own whiteness, and in so doing undergoes the movement of race as an abstract theoretical category to one of lived embodiment. In so doing, her ruminations, however limited, succeed in sketching a model for existential self-reflection and critique.

American Abstraction

America Day by Day and “An Existentialist Looks at Americans” directly address the problem of American abstraction. In these works, Beauvoir argues that Americans suffer from a lack of concrete experience because they sever the vital tie between subject and object. With the elevation of the object into an idol, the subject is denigrated into a passive vessel onto which ideology can be readily inscribed. The object produces the illusion of unconditional meaning but comes at the expense of living human beings who resign themselves to a fatalism that denies the possibility to actively shape their worlds. Beauvoir finds an enthusiastic, but ultimately hollow promotion of empty conceptions of freedom, equality, good, and evil, that morph into a kind mythological idealism, giving no ground for the creation of a concrete and shared ethical future.

“An Existentialist Looks at Americans” opens by emphasizing the importance of historical consciousness: “according to the philosophy I hold, the history of men is the work of men themselves, and concerns no one but them; they must make it meaningful; no one else can.”³ Denying that existence

is either inherently meaningful *or* absurd, Beauvoir poses a direct question to post-World War II America: “does it provide men with valid reasons for living? Does it justify their existence?”⁴ The question of whether or not American society justifies existence is, of course, an impossible question to answer—especially from an existential framework that *prima facie* denies universal meaning. The philosophy of ambiguity upholds that the question can only be addressed from the position of human beings who are constantly negotiating the experience of being free, yet situated, subjects. Our situation is entangled in the materiality of our bodies and environments, as well as the myriad influences of culture. The ambiguity of existence positions human experience between projective movement into the future and the opaque weight of the world and others that work against (or for) the actualization of freedom.⁵ In this meeting between project and world, meaning is born. Some individuals may be in favorable situations conducive to the expression of freedom through transforming the world, and others may simply suffer a loss of their transcendence so much so that it takes on the appearance of immanence. This describes the state of oppression, and one of the most effective ruses of power mystifies people into passive acceptance that such a state is natural and not created.

Beauvoir has a complex philosophy of situated freedom that walks the uneasy line between radical freedom and the realities of oppression and mystification. Maintaining a double movement of freedom that is both productive and destructive of givenness, she is also aware of certain *immanent* expenditures of freedom, what she terms, *empty* and *abstract* liberty. These latter two expressions help her explore how oppressed existents, while being essentially free, can be cut off from meaningful world transformation.⁶

Repeatedly throughout her major philosophical works, Beauvoir claims that concrete freedom is most fully actualized in creation, production, and revolt, insofar as these expressions substantially affect the world and the person expressing it. The other expressions of liberty—designated as abstract and often discussed in tandem with immanence—appear almost always in discussions of oppression. Abstract freedom merely expends itself without deeply transforming the existent’s situation. Freedom is thus *dissipated*, not annihilated or denied.⁷ While Beauvoir tends to discuss this kind of freedom in the context of oppression, she also talks about it in terms of mystification, understood as a state in which people are conditioned to believe that the situation is given by nature and therefore not subject to change. American abstraction is best understood through the notion of mystification, which in turn creates a surprising predominance of fatalism regarding the status quo. The individual, severed from meaningful world engagement, becomes passive regarding the future. The mystifying ideology of freedom and exceptionalism causes many Americans to docilely submit to a powerful elite.⁸

Initially, America captivates Beauvoir. She finds the technological and architectural ingenuity breathtaking in its scope and success. The major cities—particularly New York and Chicago—celebrate a kind of diversity that she finds lacking in Europe. The varieties of food, music, and regional practices found in both urban and rural settings give her pause to celebrate the “magnificent triumph of man.” And yet,

The truth of the world and of man resides in the bond between subject and object. To worship the object isolated from the subject, to make an idol of the thing itself, is to be caught by what we call—following Hegel and Nietzsche—the spirit of serious-mindedness. There is a tendency in America to be fascinated by the bare result without concern for the human existence that was staked on it. To an Existentialist, this is a grave danger: for since man can only find himself by committing himself to the world the loss of the one is ever accompanied by the loss of the other.⁹

Americans have an obsession with the result of mental and physical labor and a distaste bordering on conscious disregard toward its past production and future destination.¹⁰ As such, they are capable of raising the thing into an Absolute, freed from the contingencies of the situation, thereby beyond analysis and criticism. This elevation of the result into an abstract beyond is central to grasping the dangerousness of the “spirit of serious-mindedness.” The world is a human world, endowed with human meaning, a product and producer of dynamic human temporality. Ideas and goods do not spring fully formed into circulation. Nonetheless, American abstraction proceeds as if this were in fact the case.

The attitude of seriousness, which is central to Beauvoir’s understanding of inauthentic living in her earlier work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1943), involves the active denial of freedom by setting up absolute values to shield from the anguish of choice.¹¹ Those who inhabit this all-too-common attitude attempt to live a paradox—asserting freedom by choosing a meaningful end, yet denying freedom by claiming this end as an unconditional authority. The goal takes on the guise of a definitive justification for all consequent action, even as spontaneous choice set it up as a justification in the first place. Typically, Beauvoir discusses the attitude of seriousness in terms of a kind of bad faith—flight into the object (an ideology, belief, leader, etc.) submersion of subjectivity therein, and avoidance of the anguish of permanent, originary choice.¹² From this perspective then, oppression is usually conceived as the deliberate objectification of othered populations and the dehumanization executed by tyrants who set up ideals to which the freedom of others is sacrificed.¹³ The tyrannical endeavor prohibits the oppressed from choosing and enacting their own projects so as to feed off this energy to satisfy self-interested ends. This involves cutting existents off from projects, their very humanity, which consists most

fundamentally in transcending the given into an open future. The oppressed is “reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses.” When this happens, “a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things.”¹⁴

Americans, according to Beauvoir, have perfected the movement of flight into things. Over and over she finds that they cling desperately to the given:

they see the source of values and truth in things, not in themselves. . . . In Hegelian terms, one can say that the negation of the subject leads to the triumph of understanding over spirit—that is the triumph of abstraction. And that is why in this country, which seems so doggedly turned toward the concrete, the word “abstraction” has come so often to my lips. The object, erected as an idol, loses its human truth and becomes an abstraction because concrete reality envelops both object and subject.¹⁵

The philosophy of ambiguity maintains that the world is disclosed by the existent for whom it is manifest, and meaning emerges within that very movement. There is no intrinsic meaning in the subject *or* the object before the encounter itself. So clearly, to maintain that the source of value can be found out there, in the world, belies the movement of ambiguous, embodied existence. This denial breeds existential myopia and deep social divisions as it forecloses serious analysis and discussion.

Part of what makes Americans so susceptible to abstraction is that they fear honest self-critique and loathe feelings of guilt and responsibility that might awaken them to their own participation in oppressive practices. Beauvoir periodically muses on the desire of Americans to be in their own good graces. She attributes this to a kind of moral puritanism that makes “clear distinctions between Good and Evil, between True and False,” in which “ideas have consequences, but . . . are also avoided.”¹⁶ Americans will act, but only when motivated by a kind of impossible ideological purity; they do not want to commit to anything ambiguous or mired in historical contradictions. As there is no action that is not so situated, they must assert a false sense of purity and rightness. Although Americans are “not cynical” they hate having “a bad conscience. Hence, the great ‘American dilemma.’”¹⁷

This allergy toward the complexity of ambiguity can be seen in the materialistic cult of objects rampant in society. The public at large is guilty of worshipping the result of labor without concerning itself with the human existence that was employed in its creation. The obsession with the mere practical and instrumental results of action leads to the two leading challenges facing American society: its abstract relationship to time and money.

Regarding time, Americans are addicted to an empty stream of disconnected moments that offer nothing except the fleeting pleasure of their destruction: “They have no project, passion, nostalgia, or hope that engages them beyond the present; they know only the indefinite repetition of the cycle of hours and seasons. But cut off from the past and future, the present no longer has any substance; it’s nothing, just a pure, empty now.”¹⁸ As such, Americans are caught in a cycle of desire for more frequent and intense gadgets, amusements, and stimuli. The latest product, the latest method, the latest fad—map on to a decadent and corrupt national character that is insatiable in its quest for novelty. Since these objects are free-floating, largely divorced from the time of their creation and ultimate destination, they are abstractions. This makes them easily disconnected and utterly expendable, creating calamity for those who elevate these abstractions into idols.

A more authentic attitude (one that is *not* adrift amidst disconnected abstractions) requires vigilance to the past and the future in present action. In order to avoid letting an action become a “stupid and opaque fact,” there forms an obligation to

ceaselessly return to it and justify it in the unity of the project in which I am engaged. Setting up the movement of my transcendence requires that I never let it uselessly fall back upon itself, that I prolong it indefinitely. Thus I can not genuinely desire an end today without desiring it through my whole existence, insofar as it is the future of this present moment and insofar as it is the surpassed past of days to come.¹⁹

The thrust of American ingenuity, for Beauvoir, is opposed to such fidelity to the past and commitment to the future. Rather, the drive is to idolize the latest product by denying its past (i.e., its production through labor or earlier models of itself) and negating its future (as this product is destined to be quickly replaced by a newer one). As Beauvoir points out, a present detached from its past and future is a pure abstraction. Americans engage in a constant negation of the past in their desperate search for the new. Human freedom can not be maintained as a simple denial of the past but requires the preservation of it; to transcend is also to preserve. If we cannot maintain a living relationship with the past, then the present is merely an “honorary corpse” of a future present. Such absence of meaningful connection to the past also strips the future of importance and causes movement toward it to become an empty flight.

Americans, then, live time abstractly through the insatiable search for novelty: “They want to know only a present that is cut off from the flow of time, and the future they project is one that can be mechanically deduced from it, not one whose slow ripening or abrupt explosion implies unpredictable risks.”²⁰ The moment, as the meeting of time and eternity, is foreign to the

American mindset, existing merely to be obliterated. There is no preservation of what was and projection of what is to come in the monotonous stream of amusements, alcohol, cinema, gadgets, hobbies, and news. In this indefinite flight, the underlying feeling is one of loneliness, solitude, and boredom. Rushing to escape these feelings, Americans relentlessly reproduce the conditions that give rise to them in an endless circular repetition. The denial of the past and future in favor of an incessantly new “now” infects the present with a kind of stagnation: “every individual existence has a taste of death: from minute to minute, the present is merely an honorary past. It must constantly be filled with the new to conceal the curse it carries within it.”²¹ As a result, history is a cemetery and ideas die as they are born.

Just as time, when divorced from the past and any meaningful engagement with the future, results in the abstraction of an empty “now,” money too serves as the abstract arbiter of value, reducing everything to the barest common denominator. Money, rather than concrete achievement (making, building, solving, inventing) becomes the standard by which humans are valued and judged. As she later elaborates in her autobiography, Americans “were incapable of thinking, of inventing, of imagining, of choosing, of deciding for themselves; this incapacity was expressed by their conformism; in every domain of life they employed only the abstract measure of money, because they were unable to trust to their own judgment.”²² Because of the artificial division between the subjective and objective world, money becomes the central definition of worth. The object is only meaningful through a dialectical relationship with the subject for whom it is evocative. As such, there cannot really be a clearly defined *thing* that serves as the absolute goal in human endeavor. The more distinguishing qualities something has, the more it reveals the subjective mode of valuation. Money, however, can serve as the measure for all human accomplishments precisely because it is an empty symbol. In a culture that struggles to generate concrete values and meaningful projects, money provides a tool for evaluating and discerning without commitment to anything that could conjure ostracization for diverging from the norm.²³ Thus Americans elevate money as the primary goal for all action *precisely* because it eclipses the individuality of the subjects pursuing it; money equalizes all under the yardstick of wealth. But what can one do with abstract time and money except destroy them? Ultimately, a life engaged merely in the destruction of abstractions turns out to be an undeniably empty life.

A (White) Existentialist Looks at (Black) Americans

Beauvoir’s treatment of American abstraction can itself be somewhat abstract. There is no dedicated discussion of how different groups live this tendency toward abstraction, nor of the consequences for those positioned differently in social and economic circles. In fact, which “Americans” Beauvoir is talking about is often unclear and misleading. She attempts a more

nanced and careful study of Black Americans than any other people of color she observes during her visit, yet, she often makes blanket claims about “Americans” when in fact, she means White Americans of a particular social and economic standing. This can be partially explained by the fact that she was on a four-month college speaking tour, and therefore socializing primarily with privileged White Americans, but it does not solve the slippage often observed between Americans as a whole, and White and Black Americans as subsets.

In spite of its shortcomings, Beauvoir still offers a significant contribution in her critique of American race relations that did not go unnoticed even at the time of its first translation in to English in 1952. In 1954, professor of romance languages at Howard University, Will Mercer Cook, penned a review of *America Day by Day*, calling the book an interesting addition to French observations of the United States. He notes that it is difficult to review because of its impressionistic nature and Beauvoir’s adoption of an individual existential perspective rather than an absolutist view.²⁴ This is, as Mercer notes, problematic insofar as there are no definitive conclusions to draw, but also strategic, insofar as it shows a unique cross-cultural analysis that in no way claims to be universal. He writes:

In the midst of debatable generalizations and minute detail (which sometimes becomes boring to this reviewer), there are brilliant passages in this book, as for example the discussions of American literature and some of the analyses of the American and his role in the present day world. Especially noteworthy are the numerous references to the Negro for they reveal the importance that our friends abroad attach to American race relations.²⁵

Mercer highlights Beauvoir’s relationship to Richard and Ellen Wright as her main access to American race relations, recalling her visit to the Savoy, the Abyssinia Baptist Church, her walking tour of Harlem, and visit to the South. While not shying away from its deficiencies, Mercer concludes: “Few contemporary studies offer Americans a better opportunity to see ourselves as others see us.”²⁶ To be an outsider looking in carries with it the advantages of having a perspective not mired in the observed traditions and practices, and provides a chance to come to a new level of self-understanding.

American racism relates directly to Beauvoir’s discussion of abstraction. Her own connection to questions of race and ethnicity (directly discussing the Jewish, Muslim, Chinese, and Algerian people, among others) can be found throughout her works, sometimes producing careful analysis and other times careless oversimplification and stereotyping. Black Americans are the most consistently addressed and analyzed group in her works from the 1940s. Beauvoir uses the term “blacks” as well as “Negroes” in her writings. These terms denote those people whom she views as being the inheritors of the

abuses of (mostly) American slavery and the those who live under subsequent degrees of segregation and oppression.²⁷ Beauvoir's reliance on Black Americans as a primary support for her analysis of oppressive practices has been taken to task by a number of scholars, as early as the 1970s.²⁸ More recently, Patricia Hill Collins notes that Beauvoir's heavy reliance on the race/gender analogy in the development of her theory of existential freedom limits "the imagined possibilities of freedom."²⁹ Beauvoir repeatedly draws a connection between the oppression of American Blacks and women which oversimplifies the differences, as well as erases Black women from the equation entirely. Kathryn Sophia Belle criticizes that "most often the woman that Beauvoir refers to as the Other is a white woman whose subordination is being compared to or juxtaposed with the subjugations of men through different forms of oppression."³⁰ Therefore, Beauvoir's analysis of race expunges the different experiences within groups in order to draw blanket comparisons between "blacks" and women. While this is most explicit in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, it is also present in *America Day by Day*.³¹

Taking both the criticism and the specific existential framework of Beauvoir's observations into account, I turn now to how Beauvoir reads American abstraction into the question of race. She states that American Blacks are considered to be politically apathetic and resigned to their situations, which is a direct product of violence and social intimidation. In this way, she shows how the fatalism that affects all Americans, has a unique impact on Black Americans. Instead of it being the result of a somewhat willful ignorance (as it is with most White Americans) it is the direct result of disenfranchisement and social terrorization.

Additionally, the oppression of Black Americans arises from the overall tendency of the culture to systematically degrade time and activity into abstract moments and dollars. Once the subject has split from the object, and the object raised into an idol robbed of concrete meaning, racism, oppression, and tyranny can be accepted, so long as they keep time and cash flowing. Without a meaningful, living connection between a subject and their values, both become isolated atoms in the social sphere. This means that those who serve the advancement of capitalism are reduced to their abstract monetary value and, additionally, that the abstraction of temporality obliterates the historical violence enacted on populations. As Sonia Kruks notes, "When abstraction is a general societal norm, it is also conducive to the reduction of others to 'objective' categories: to racist pseudoscience and to stereotyping. It thus serves to legitimize both economic exploitation and cultural appropriation."³² When the bond between the existent and the world becomes an abstraction, the possibilities for unethical behavior multiply and thrive.

Beauvoir's view of White Americans on the issue of race and racism is almost entirely critical. Other than her experiences with Ellen Wright, who struggles to shield her and Richard Wright's daughter from constant

dehumanizing judgment, Beauvoir finds that whiteness in the United States is propped up by a feeling of entitlement and artificial superiority. While certainly not the first outsider to notice deeply entrenched racism, she offers a unique orientation of observation and critique. Very early into her trip she attends a party hosted by French ex-patriots, one of whom asks her to promise not to write anything about America because it is a complex country and her four-month visit could only produce superficial observations. In particular she must “‘promise’ to write nothing about the blacks. This is a painful and difficult problem on which no one can have an opinion without a wealth of information that would require more than one lifetime.”³³ And besides, her earnest countryman presses, why do the French care so much about Black Americans anyway, since White intellectual, artistic, and musical accomplishments are far superior? While she does not openly admit that this provocation serves as a kind of dare (which it most certainly does), she ignores the plea.

With these words in the back of her mind, Beauvoir decides to visit Harlem on foot despite the warnings that a White woman should never do such a thing. Upon entering, she notes that there is a kind of invisible force along the border that she names as fear: “Not mine but that of others—the fear of all those whites who never take the risk of going to Harlem, who feel the presence of a vast, mysterious, and forbidden zone in the northern part of their city, where they are transformed into the enemy.”³⁴ The vagueness and mystery that she feels is essential, as it signifies American abstraction and the erasure of cultural memory. She senses White fear in the present that is built upon a foundation of willful historical and cultural expurgation. This reappears as a kind of haunting, rather than a concrete social and political reality that can be named.

Seeing people in Harlem living their life on their own terms throws Beauvoir back onto herself; no one really cares that she is there. She remains, she believes, unnoticed. Harlem is a world on its own. While she is not herself frightened, “the fear is there; it weighs on this great popular festivity. Crossing the street is, for me, like crossing through layers and layers of fear.”³⁵ This fear, she points out, emanates from the hearts of other White people, but it works in an unusual way, present insofar as it is denied and ignored. “The irrational fear they inspire can only be the reverse of hatred and a kind of remorse. Planted in the heart of New York, Harlem weighs on the conscience of whites like original sin on a Christian.”³⁶ The inability to confront the past and present realities of racial oppression takes on a spectral aura surrounding the good conscience of White Americans.

A critical component of the racist fear that Beauvoir experiences is how it hinges on the positive self-image Americans desperately crave. She is amazed by how much Americans desire to be in their own good graces. They desperately want to be “good” and “happy” and, more importantly, for others to think that they are so. Anything that may challenge this fragile,

harmonious, self-image is relegated to the outermost fringes of moral awareness. Beauvoir claims that White people who are not actively working for the overturning of racist structures “try to deny this rupture in the heart of their own city; they try to deny Harlem, to forget it. It’s not a threat to the future; it’s a wound in the present, a cursed city, the city where they are cursed. It’s themselves they’re afraid to meet on the street corners.”³⁷ And the “moral discomfort” that pervades is not anomalous, but central to the White American psyche.

The fear and hatred so evident in New York City becomes even more pronounced and appalling once Beauvoir tours the South. Visiting Texas, Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia, she observes a marked transition between the northern and southern states. Whereas Harlem appeared as a city unto itself, with its own class structure and economy, the South is far more vicious to her eyes. Savannah exudes its history of colonialization and slavery, preserving the past as a dead monument to the brutality that made it what it is. Around this city is another one filled with the children of slavery who do not simply ignore Beauvoir, but are openly hostile to her presence. She feels hatred, rage, and the specter of imminent revolt, forcing her to address the “black problem” in America.

Much of Beauvoir’s ensuing analysis of race in the United States overtly borrows from Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. This book argues that the “black problem” is foremost a White problem.³⁸ Beauvoir remarks that thinking on this problem causes a sense of danger and discomfort in White people, a sense of guilt, and a dread of the reviled “bad conscience.”³⁹ Drawing parallels between French colonialists who are able to rationalize contradictory behaviors and opinions about the colonized, Beauvoir observes that in either case, the inferiority of the oppressed must be construed as a given fact. Rejecting any scientific basis to the concept of “race” herself, she finds White Americans are eager to fix Black American identity as the contrary to ideal whiteness. This gives rise to the ferociousness of stereotyping, segregation, and discrimination. While Beauvoir notes that racists “will admit for the most part that the black person is not *a priori* tainted as an individual,” it is clear that “when he leaves his station . . . he becomes a danger.”⁴⁰ In other words, if they maintain their status as a thing—cut off from the future and the past—their existence can be minimally tolerated; if they exist as an abstraction able to support monetary exchange, they have a place. But only insofar as they stay there. Thus, Black Americans *are* inferior, uncultured, lazy, dishonest, and dirty in White frameworks and practice. But what does it mean to “be” something? “Does it define an immutable substance, like oxygen? Or does it describe a moment in a situation that *has evolved*, like every human situation?”⁴¹ Just as she will soon argue about woman in *The Second Sex*, it is obvious that there is an evolution of identity crafted through oppressive practices. To come to terms with this reality requires honest reflection and critique, upon which

America has built its foundation avoiding. Legally and economically disadvantaged, disproportionately impoverished and prey to racist courts, voter suppression, and police violence, Beauvoir claims that Black Americans succumb to a kind of resignation and adaptation to the intractability of the status quo on the one hand, and the smoldering fires of revolt and revolution on the other.⁴² Due to the positioning of Black Americans as inferior and menacing, White Americans accede to their own form of resignation in accepting the status quo as natural and justified.

Moving from Abstraction to Concreteness

As Mary Pepchinski notes, Beauvoir desired to write a different kind of French observation on the United States. While Jacques-Laurent Bost and Jean-Paul Sartre had also written essays on America, Beauvoir's distinctive position gives her unique access, allowing her to pass through borders that others either could or would not. Moving through different spaces, she "desired to test the extent of her freedom to comprehend the mechanisms of racial separation."⁴³ This final section explores how Beauvoir's positionality (as a White, educated, foreign, middle-aged woman) grants her access not only to critique, but also to phenomenologically and experientially undergoing the movement from racial abstraction to concreteness. She begins as a kind of ethereal renegade rule-breaker in New York City and ends as a relatively self-aware bearer of whiteness in the South. Her journey—from alien spectator to one who cannot avoid the way in which her facticity shapes her views—is central to both her critique of America and her acknowledgment of herself as a part of the story.

In order to read Beauvoir's experience as one moving from abstraction to concreteness requires reading her meditations on race strategically. As Robert Bernasconi argues, "her writing on race must be seen in the same terms during the process of which she gradually came to an understanding of her own racial prejudices."⁴⁴ Taking into account her acknowledged finite position, her journey is one wherein she moves from the abstraction of a bodyless gaze to being a White person. Her whiteness marks her for others—either as an ally or enemy—or, more importantly, as one who cannot neutrally observe from afar. Beauvoir's real contribution is not, consequently, a theoretical analysis of racism (which is borrowed largely from Myrdal's work) but the lived experience of hatred, shame, and guilt awakening her to her own place in the question of race in America. In this way, the abstract race problem becomes concretized in her very body.

Beauvoir's initial experiences are common for most who visit a foreign country for the first time. There is a sharpness to feeling completely out of place. "My presence is a borrowed presence. There is no place for me on these sidewalks. This strange world where I've landed by surprise was not waiting for me. It was full without me; it *is* full without me. It is a world where I am not: I grasp it in my perfect absence."⁴⁵ This breathtaking description of a new

place and a new culture is illuminating yet, admittedly, not one that can be maintained. With time and engagement, absence becomes anchored in time and space. As Beauvoir wakes the next day, she muses that “No one here is concerned with my presence; I’m still a ghost, and I slip through the city without disturbing anything,”⁴⁶ yet her ghostlike existence rapidly begins to concretize. She begins with observations of the visual presentation of the city and then quickly takes to explore by foot. While she upholds her position of remote observer for much of the adventure, her examinations on race force her to confront the artificiality living as abstractly.

D. Rita Alfonso notes that Beauvoir’s own status as a self-proclaimed outsider is impossible to maintain insofar as the race problem is not just a White problem, nor is it merely an American problem. Alfonso charts Beauvoir’s journey as she moves from unmarked “ghost” in New York, passing boundaries of neighborhoods and race, to experiencing her whiteness stinging her skin in Texas. Whereas Beauvoir felt empowered to travel through Harlem unscathed, the experience of segregation in the South physically affects her: “This is the first time we’re seeing with our own eyes the segregation that we’ve heard so much about. And although we’d been warned, something fell onto our shoulders that would not lift all through the South; it was our skin that became heavy and stifling, its color making us burn.”⁴⁷ In the middle of the Texas desert, the segregated bathrooms, waiting rooms, and restaurants throw her back onto herself and cause much more than a moment of detached reflection. Rather, she undergoes an acutely embodied and affective event. Her whiteness enfolds her body and refuses to leave for the rest of the southern journey. In the Texas desert, “Beauvoir’s status as an outsider disintegrates.”⁴⁸ The whiteness scalding her skin “is a moment of authenticity that readies her for the task of becoming a witness to oppression.”⁴⁹ This confrontation cannot simply be theorized away, as it scratches itself into her body, constituting an inescapable dimension of her facticity, and altering the discussions of race in the remainder of the book. This presents a kind of movement from abstraction to concreteness that—whether intentionally or not—models a movement that Beauvoir believes Americans cannot, but should, make.

The weight of her whiteness increases as she continues further into the “great tragedy of the South.”⁵⁰ On a bus trip from New Orleans to Savannah, she perceives more hatred and jealousy between Black and White Americans. She witnesses the physical segregation of the bus and the waiting rooms, the total lack of care for a fainting pregnant Black woman in distress, and the hostility from the Black communities through which the bus travels. Finally, Beauvoir feels the intense discomfort of her own whiteness in the Black belt around Savannah. There, she and her companion, Natalie Sorokine, are the objects of the Look, feeling hatred and rage focused on their presence: “As we go by, voices drop, gestures stop, smiles die: all life is suspended in the depths of those angry eyes.”⁵¹ It comes as a relief to break the tension of the gaze

when an old woman spits twice at their presence and a little girl runs away calling them “enemies.” There is no escaping the lived, affective experience of her whiteness in these moments, even if she fails to fully own them.

While the bulk of White Americans she meets along her journey do not engage in authentic self-reflection, Beauvoir’s writing shows us that she does. Her experiences of whiteness in the south force her to become a temporal being who must confront the realities of the past of the United States. In this vein, Beauvoir criticizes the characterization of the United States as a “young” country, still in its childhood and thus somewhat “innocent” in its engagements. She warns that this childish adoption of serious, sedimented values in an adult culture is not mere naïveté, but the result of a deliberate carelessness that is both morally reprehensible and politically treacherous. “It’s sometimes said that America is the country of youth. I’m not so sure. Real young people are engaged in moving toward the future of mankind, not enclosing themselves in the complacent resignation that’s been assigned to them.”⁵² This kind of complacency and temporal denial is precisely what gives rise to the anti-Black racism woven into the very fabric of the nation. Beauvoir learns, and through her education we learn as well, that the abstraction cannot be maintained when history is etched onto one’s very body.

Finally, a decisive experience of race occurs in Chicago toward the conclusion of her stay. In a brutal and stark trip to a slaughterhouse, Beauvoir comes to see the concrete realities of race and money. Aware of the American tendency to idolize the result of labor without concern for the laborers who create it, the slaughterhouse reveals to her an alarming truth. Time (the unquenchable thirst for speed and consumption) and money (the exploitation of vulnerable populations in capitalist enterprise) come to a head in this visit. Calling it an “enormous concentration camp,” she notes that the treatment of the animals is a pure abstraction from their living materiality. Their horrific death is neatly transformed into abstract monetary numbers and tidy packages for sale. She observes that “the gap that separates the world of profit from the world of work is more obvious here than elsewhere.”⁵³

The heat, dull light, and violence on display dramatically effect her. The smell alone causes a nausea that pervades the tour. And while stirred by the travesty of the animal slaughter, she is far more moved by the Black bodies who are doing the grisly work. She observes that it is “no accident that the bloody arms carving up the carcasses are nearly all black arms under their red-stained gloves.” These bloodied arms call up the forgotten history of labor strikes and racial battles in which, ultimately, Black Americans were the losers.⁵⁴ In sum, “this colossal slaughter is the visible tragedy, but it’s only the symbol of another, crueler, deeper tragedy. In order to live, man consumes non-human lives, but he also feeds on the lives of other humans.”⁵⁵ Here, Beauvoir’s insight into time, money, and race reach a crescendo, and she speaks in the most concrete, carnal words she can muster. While Americans

can treat these matters as abstractions, Beauvoir's journey has led her to a point where she lives the full, undeniable weight of the circumstances. As such, she provides a model for a kind of existential conversion wherein the chasm between what one "is" and what one "is not" must be assumed, rather than surpassed or denied. As Beauvoir accepts her position as a White woman in America, she accepts the failure of being a disembodied observer and the ethical onus to avoid abstraction herself. In so doing, she enacts a constructive movement of assuming freedom, and a negative movement that rejects oppression in oneself as others: "in construction, as in rejection, it is a matter of reconquering freedom on the contingent facticity of existence, that is, of taking the given, which, at the start, is *there* without any reason, as something willed by man."⁵⁶ Such work is never finished, but involves a constant struggle to avoid the dangers of seriousness and abstraction.

Conclusion

"The American," Beauvoir writes, "is afraid of that cold isolation, of that dereliction into which man falls when he splits off from what is given." Yet, she continues, "from this kind of separation the drama of human existence is born."⁵⁷ Lacking the drive or awareness to separate from the given, much of the populace is manipulatable, either enacting or suffering exploitation and degradation. Plagued by the boredom, isolation, and solitude resulting from the emptiness of novelties and wealth, the American people become defeatist and resigned to the present state of affairs. Certainly, different populations suffer resignation in different ways. According to Beauvoir, White Americans are resigned to the repetition of the status quo that keeps them in power and Black Americans are largely resigned to the oppressive practices that keep them down. Regardless, the isolation and manipulation affects everyone, denuding existence of passion and engagement, and promoting tyranny and violence through unchecked demonstrations of power.

The expression of transcendent freedom through creation and revolt is thus culturally stymied at every turn in so many aspects of American life. As a result, "there is no place for authentically revolutionary action in America; at this point in time, one must be resigned to a wait-and-see policy."⁵⁸ Action is robbed of meaning when it stands cut off from time and the things it produces. This helps to explain why Beauvoir both sees the possibility of "immanent revolt" in Black Americans (particularly in the South) and a kind of resignation that overlays oppressed and complicit groups. When time, money, and race are lived abstractly, the motivation for change suffers a kind of indefinite postponement. This uneasy complacency encourages the oppressed to suffer in silence and those in power to stay the course.

Although she would never claim that Americans as a *whole* are oppressed, they do suffer under a kind of cultural mystification. Whether or not she is right about this, or even had a broad enough knowledge of social movements for change that were active at the time, she speaks to how

America discloses itself in her experience. In the *Ethics*, she tells us that the attitude of seriousness shares a close bond with tyranny. She warns that:

The serious man is dangerous. It is natural that he makes himself a tyrant. Dishonestly ignoring the subjectivity of his choice, he pretends that the unconditioned value of the object is being asserted through him; and by the same token he also ignores the value of the subjectivity and the freedom of others, to such an extent that, sacrificing them to the thing, he persuades himself that what he sacrifices is nothing.⁵⁹

Through violence, intimidation, and disenfranchisement, the ugly work of serious-mindedness churns out oppressive structures and does so by claiming they are ahistorical abstract absolutes that cannot be meaningfully changed. The abstractions of time and money in turn generate abstract ideals (such as equality, freedom, and goodness) that fail to account for historical accretion and capitalist exploitation. With the profound separation of individuals in space, time, and labor, comes the propensity to forget past history—willfully or ignorantly—and the inability to envision ethical futures. As a result, the majority of Americans are “content to let their lives go round in the same circle. They have neither the taste nor the understanding for collective life; nor are they concerned about their individual fates. This is the source of the sadness I’ve often felt around them; this world that’s full of generous promise is crushing them.”⁶⁰

In describing the politics of American democracy she observes that “the sad truth is that the ‘general interest’ applies only to a ‘private’ category of citizens—those who profit from the ruling elite and who intend to go on profiting. And the others are free only to the extent that they submit, which is the most abstract of freedoms.”⁶¹ Conformity to abstractions maintains a kind of treadmill where energy that could otherwise go to creative social and individual projects, dissipates in mere existence.⁶² A passive, thoughtless populace is not only easy to deploy and control, but is also complicit in the abuse of vulnerable communities.

Given the current social and political landscape of the United States, Beauvoir provides a timely meditation on a problem that has deep historical roots. The struggles against anti-Black racism in America often have to contend with a deep denial of history and a capitalist system that sees human beings in terms of profit or loss. Slavery created a legacy of violence and inequality that continues to negatively and directly affect employment, housing, education, policing, wealth, and representation. To argue for the presence of the past in current affairs requires disarming the vociferous claims that the past is the past, and all such abuses have either been rectified or are no longer relevant. To deny that the present enshrines the past is to fall prey to the very tendencies of abstraction Beauvoir criticized over seventy years

ago. Her critique of time, money, and race is every bit as relevant today, in some ways even more so, as it reveals how pernicious and long standing the American tendency toward abstraction is, and the dangerousness of refusing to engage in honest self-critique.

Beauvoir's evaluation of the United States expands her understanding of the ways in which freedom can dissipate itself into abstractions rather than engage itself in concrete action. The artificial elevation of the object over the valuating subject severs the necessary link between existent and world and allows for the proliferation of abstractions such as the empty moment and the almighty dollar to which people swear allegiance. Such adherence to the thinnest of human creations allows for the indefinite flight from the very freedom and responsibility that Beauvoir's existentialism promotes, creating mystification, racial oppression, and deep social divisions. What she offers Americans is the experience of one individual who undergoes the concretization of race through confronting the realities of history and exploitation. While it is not a universal solution, it is an enactment of authentic self-reflection and change. She offers, in short, a picture of existential conversion and ethical commitment.

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, trans. Carol Cosman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), xviii.

² Karen Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Anne Lavelle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Vintges explains that the art of living "expresses in compact form how moral decisions are made; it not only articulates the fact that ethics takes on the form of a concrete, individual approach to life, but also represents the attitude that moral decisions come about in a continual creative process without the application of general methods, moral laws, or rules," 83.

³ Simone de Beauvoir, "An Existentialist Looks at Americans," in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 307. For an overview of the history of this piece, see Shannon M. Mussett, *Introduction* to "An Existentialist Looks at Americans," in *Philosophical Writings* by Simone de Beauvoir, ed. Margaret A. Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005): 301-305.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The idea of existence and therefore ethical choice as necessarily ambiguous is the explicit theme of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1997).

⁶ Alongside the creative and revolutionary expressions of freedom, Beauvoir discovers two fundamentally *impotent* expressions in “complaint” (*la plainte*) and “resignation” (*la résignation*). Complaint and resignation help to illustrate the notion of abstract freedom, insofar as they name phenomena where human action fails to transform the world in a positive way but does not simply disappear. For more on the notion of abstract freedom, see Shannon M. Mussett, “Moving Beyond Hegel: The Paradox of Immanent Freedom in Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophy,” *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Phenomenology*, ed. Cynthia Coe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming, 2021).

⁷ As she explains in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “his transcendence is cut off from his goal . . . there is no longer any hold on objects which might give it a valid content, [thus] *his spontaneity is dissipated* without founding anything.” Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 30, italics my own.

⁸ Beauvoir’s formulation of abstraction shares similarities with the Marxist and post-Marxist notion of “reification” where human relationships and characteristics take on a seemingly independent existence which stand over and against living, acting existents.

⁹ Beauvoir, “An Existentialist Looks at Americans,” 309.

¹⁰ Americans have “the taste for simple results and the disdain for the process that leads to them.” Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 312.

¹¹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 47.

¹² Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 26.

¹³ In oppression, “transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals. That is what defines a situation of oppression. Such a situation is never natural: man is never oppressed by things.” Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 81. Oppression can be a direct and deliberate course of action employed by those with power over those who do not have it, or it can be the result of long-standing institutions and practices.

¹⁴ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 100.

¹⁵ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 385.

¹⁶ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 348. In her autobiography, Beauvoir is even more critical, saying that American chauvinism was rampant across the political spectrum and that “it was impossible to dislodge them, even for an instant, from their convictions; discussion often seemed to me to as futile as with advanced paranoics.”

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance 1: After the War*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 123.

¹⁷ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 237.

¹⁸ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 266.

¹⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 27.

²⁰ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 385.

²¹ Ibid. See also “An Existentialist Looks at Americans,” 311.

²² Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance*, 123-124.

²³ Beauvoir, *America Day By Day*, 387.

²⁴ Mercer Cook, “Review of *America Day by Day*,” *The Journal of Negro History* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 1954): 63.

²⁵ Cook, “Review of *America Day by Day*,” 64.

²⁶ Cook, “Review of *America Day by Day*,” 65.

²⁷ Beauvoir also discusses French Blacks in works such as *She Came to Stay (L’invitée)* but with much less frequency. She not only discusses the conditions of American Blacks in her writings on the United States, but also in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir’s recognition of French racism is woefully inadequate at this point in time and does not come to the foreground until her work on the cruelties of the French colonialism of Algeria. See Simone de Beauvoir and Gisele Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green (New York : MacMillan, 1962).

²⁸ See, for example, Margaret A. Simons, “Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood (1979),” in *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

²⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, “Simone de Beauvoir, Women’s Oppression and Existential Freedom,” in *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 331. While Collins looks at how African Americans appear analogically in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *The Second Sex*, and *America Day by Day*, Kathryn Sophia Belle (formerly Kathryn T. Gines) studies the analogy in detail in *The Second Sex* in “Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy” in *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Donna-Dale L. Marcano, Kathryn T. Gines (now Belle), and Maria del Guadalupe (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 35-51. Both Collins and Belle point out the problematic analogy between (White) women and (Black) men, and discuss how Beauvoir does not engage the scholarship or experiences of Black women. As Margaret A. Simons had earlier written, “Beauvoir was not the first feminist to use the racism analogy. It’s wide use by nineteenth-century feminists reflects an earlier

historic link between feminism and the African American struggle against racist oppression.” “Richard Wright, Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Second Sex* (1997)” in *Beauvoir and the Second Sex*, 169. Later, Belle analyzes Beauvoir’s problematic comparison of women’s oppression with slavery, particularly in *The Second Sex*, arguing that Beauvoir errs “on the one hand, by collapsing diverse systems of oppression as the same, and on the other hand, by distinguishing between these systems of oppression in a way that privileges gender difference and oppression above other forms of oppression.” “Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, no. 1-2 (2014): 266. For more on the problems with woman as slave, see Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Sabine Broeck, “Re-Reading de Beauvoir ‘After Race’: Woman-as-Slave Revisited,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 167-184.

³⁰ Belle, “Comparative and Competing Frameworks,” 259

³¹ While the explicit parallel between women and American Blacks is not taken up in her writings on the United States, her transatlantic experiences were undertaken during the time between the publication of her most important ethical and feminist works, the latter which explicitly evoked this analogy.

³² Sonia Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75.

³³ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 17.

³⁴ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 34.

³⁵ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 35.

³⁶ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 36.

³⁷ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 36. While Beauvoir can be criticized for being a tourist of the lives of Harlem citizens, she at least realizes she is, acknowledging after an evening out with the Wrights that her peaceful jaunt fills her with a bad conscience (37). Her remarks on the Savoy where she watches Black Americans dancing is little more than stereotyping (37-89) but it does give rise to the observation, repeated in *The Second Sex*, that racists, capitalists, and colonialists all say that the workers and natives are happier than they are, so why bother addressing the structural inequities that marginalize and oppress them? (39).

³⁸ Gunnar Myrdal’s, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944) has as its main thesis that “the American legacy of slavery introduces a contradiction between its liberal ideal of ‘equality for all,’ and the reality of inequality as embodied in its racist institutions and practices.” Rita D.

Alfonso “Transatlantic Perspectives on Race: Simone de Beauvoir’s Phenomenology of ‘Race’ in *America Day by Day*,” *Philosophy Today: SPEP Supplement* 49, no. 5 (2005): 91. Scholars such as Simons, Belle, Collins, and others have drawn attention to the widespread reliance on this study of American Black racism conducted by a White Swedish male economist. *An American Dilemma*, as well as Alva Myrdal’s essay, “A Parallel to the Negro Problem” included as an appendix to the former, intimately shaped Beauvoir’s reflections on her experiences of race in America (Simons, “The Roots of Radical Feminism,” 151-152). See also Kathryn Sophia Belle (formerly Kathryn T. Gines), “Simone de Beauvoir and the Race/Gender Analogy in the *The Second Sex* Revisited,” *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017); and Collins, “Simone de Beauvoir, Women’s Oppression and Existential Freedom.”

³⁹ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 237.

⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 241.

⁴¹ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 239. A few pages later Beauvoir notes that “Whites can mask their responsibility . . . in the conditions of blacks, they find an apparent confirmation of their behavior toward them. One of the reasons that allows them to believe, sometimes with a large dose of good faith, in the inferiority of blacks is that that inferiority exists—but it exists because they’ve created it, because they are still creating it, and this they refuse to acknowledge” (245).

⁴² Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 240-248.

⁴³ Mary Pepchinski, “The Gendered User and the Generic City: Simone de Beauvoir’s *America Day by Day*,” *ABE Journal* 16 (2019): 6.

⁴⁴ Bernasconi, Robert, “Richard Wright as Educator: The Progressive Structure of Simone de Beauvoir’s Account of Racial Hatred in the United States,” *Yale French Studies* 135, no. 6 (2019): 151. Bernasconi later makes another important point. “We tend to take for granted our broader concept of racism, which also includes systemic racism, which we recognize in colonialism and sharecropping. She used the noun *racism* only once in the book,” instead relying on notions of hatred and oppression (164). This is significant because it both shows Beauvoir’s limitations in her analysis of American racism, while also highlights the phenomenological and affective dimensions in what Beauvoir wrote. It was not a theoretical analysis of racism, but the lived experience of hatred, shame, and guilt that woke her to her own place in the question of race in America.

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 7.

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 203. Michael D. Berber shows how this “phenomenological moment” is one wherein at the pretheoretical level, “the clear line that reflection would draw between one’s skin and the other’s is blurred.” “Phenomenology and the Ethical Bases of Pluralism: Arendt and Beauvoir on Race in the United States,” in *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Wendy O’Brien and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2001), 168.

⁴⁸ Alfonso, “Transatlantic Perspectives on Race,” 90.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 233.

⁵¹ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 236. Bernasconi writes, “Beauvoir’s experiences in the Southern United States enabled her to see beyond the surface impressions that had mislead her on her initial stay in New York,” “Richard Wright as Educator,” 161. Bernasconi continues to show how Richard Wright played a fundamental role in ultimately showing Beauvoir that she had a tendency to exoticize African Americans and that the North and South were both involved in American racism. Beauvoir’s writing, in fact, illustrates for readers “the dangers of responding positively to such exoticizations” (163).

⁵² Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 143.

⁵³ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 376.

⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 378. She continues: “since then, this game has continued: the bosses profit from the wretched situation of blacks, who are allowed to enter only a few professions and who are used systematically against union workers.”

⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 378.

⁵⁶ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 156.

⁵⁷ Beauvoir, “An Existentialist Looks at Americans,” 313.

⁵⁸ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 346.

⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 49.

⁶⁰ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 383.

⁶¹ Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 292.

⁶² Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, 295.