Black Traditions in International Law

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Concept Note

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Black traditions in international law express and foreground the goals, histories and ideologies of black struggle. Black traditions have long offered visions of global order that challenge the color blindness embedded in accounts of international law. Black traditions counter visions of international law that conceptualize the world in accordance with predominantly European and white conceptions of hierarchy and order. They challenge distortions black and non-white peoples as inferior and therefore fair game for subjugation and dehumanization through practices such as slavery and colonialism and the continuing legacies of these practices to date. This project aims to redress the invisibility of Black traditions in the official stories of conventional international law. The research agenda of this project is defined by the following goals:

(a) to bring race and racial equality to the center of international legal discussions and to trace the continuing power of race in structuring global power and international law;

(b) to begin to systemically recover the international legal contributions of African Americans, black peoples and the black diaspora to international law and practice and how these scholars and practitioners inaugurated new streams of black international legal thought that foreground their histories, concerns and perspectives;

(c) to fill the gap in international law scholarship by nudging and encouraging scholarship and teaching about race, including how it intersects with gender and class, across all domains and subject areas of international law;

(d) to build alliances among a diverse coalition of scholars and practitioners interested in collaborating and moving forward on these themes.

In pursuing the foregoing objectives, this project will trace the international legal claims of African Americans, black peoples and of the black diaspora to freedom from slavery and its continuing remnants in the United States, the Caribbean, in Latin America and elsewhere. In doing so, the project will trace the freedom dreams of blacks that have been sidelined and marginalized in international legal publications as well as in leading international law societies. It will make more visible how black international lawyers and activists were involved in struggles against slavery, in debates surrounding the design of the League of Nations and the United Nations, the anti-apartheid struggle, among others. Black international lawyers and activists were also deeply involved in anti-colonial and anti-imperial politics. Even more, black international lawyers envisioned radically different and compelling visions of global order over the last century and a half. Black international lawyers continue to do so to date. Yet their visions or involvement and contributions are hardly acknowledged or even widely known.

At a conceptual level, this project does not assume that racial differences are the same everywhere. Instead, it recognizes that racial formations have not been enacted in the same way everywhere, but rather that racialization takes different forms in different places. Yet this project also recognizes that racial differences are often mobilized to create and sustain inequality in a wide

variety of places. By tracing the various ways in which race is mobilized or hidden in different places, this project aims to unearth the ways in which race is obscured or how it becomes invisible in international legal scholarship.

For see the link here for The 2022 Loyola University Chicago School of Law International Law Colloquium: Black Traditions in International Law.

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